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BOUNTY OF THE PROMISED LAND

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Cover photograph: Justin Walker
Food styling: Mariana Velasquez
Prop styling: Allie Wist

Standing watch over a cauldron of beef and paprika stew on the hills of Somló, Hungary's new-old wine region. See page 48 for story.

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Make the perfect post-shift drink with chef Andrew Carmellini at saveur.com/sin-of-all-sins.

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Stop Saying Foodie

But really. Let's be done with that goofy word, that epithet for tone-deaf epicures. It's always been an infantilizing label. Worse: It's *self*-infantilizing. (Know any avid photographers who eagerly introduce themselves as "shutterbugs"? I'm guessing not.) The real problem with the word is the way it's designed to divide: the folks who claim the title as a way of standing above the food-as-fuel fray from those who deploy the term as derogatory shorthand for what they view as a probably vapid, definitely elitist fixation with what we put in our mouths. So let's let the bracing winds of a new season usher in a new era of saying... something else. Maybe we don't need a catchall word for people who appreciate a great meal and what goes into it. Maybe we can just focus on the pleasures of eating, cooking, and drinking and leave labels where they belong—on modified corn and the side of wine bottles.

I'd call it a New Year's resolution, but we never use that term around the office much anyway. We tend to go with culinary enthusiasts, like-minded food nerds, or simply "SAVEUR readers." We called a few of these folks to hear their resolutions for 2016.

Baker and author Dorie Greenspan vows to "make a fuss over breakfast. I'll probably still eat at my desk, but at least I'll be eating breakfast," she says. Baker, author, and Milk Bar empire-builder Christina Tosi plans to make a lot of meals for her friends at home: "There is nothing better than inviting friends for brunch, lunch, or dinner, or a snack-filled slumber party!"

Dan Barber of Blue Hill plans to spend more time at home, too, some of it actually sitting down. "My wife, Aria, can't understand why I'm unable to simultaneously sit and eat. I stand, or as she says, 'rock back and forth like a crazy' while I'm rooting and grazing through the pantry. My New Year's resolution is simple: I want to learn to eat while sitting down."

Wayward Canadian and Southern chef Hugh Acheson resolves to "make more omelets this year, but not be all OCD about it." And he doesn't want to hear that you're over kale. "I resolve to defend kale from all attackers. I still love kale, people." For Susan Feniger (Border Grill, Mud Hen Tavern), it's not about what to eat but when: "No more big bowls of buttered, salted popcorn after midnight. Only before midnight!"

Finally, Jody Williams of Buvette, in both Paris and New York, has simple goals: "To start drinking seriously again. This is my year of single malts. I promise to gain an intimate knowledge and appreciation of the grain."

Curious drinkers and committed breakfast-makers. Stay-at-home dinner party throwers. Reformed pantry grazers. Clearly these are our kind of folks—whatever you call them.

Adam

Adam Sachs

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TWO NEW SAVEUR COOKBOOKS — TWO GREAT TAKES ON DELICIOUS COMFORT FOOD



WHEREVER FINE BOOKS ARE SOLD
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The Brighter Side of Winter Vegetables

ENLIVENED WITH SNAPPY PICKLED SUNCHOKES, FRIED GINGERY BITS, AND A WHOLE LOT OF CITRUS, HERE ARE FOUR FRESH TAKES ON COLD-WEATHER SALADS

Story and Recipes by Kim Alter
Photographs by Ryan Liebe

No chef wants to open a restaurant in winter. Instead, you want to burst on the scene, edible flowers at the ready, when the markets are overflowing with gorgeous produce. Unfortunately, I haven't been so lucky: The last three restaurants I opened were all supposed to debut in summer, but each was delayed until long after the fields had turned brown. And now, as I prepare to open a fourth restaurant in San Francisco, Nightbird, it's the same story all over again—another winter opening. I used to want to bang my head on the wall, but as a chef you learn to adjust. Winter dishes needn't be limited to comforting stews and hearty braises; we can make things that are light on their toes and don't leave you feeling weighed down after dinner.

Here's one trick: Use a ton of acid to add brightness and tenderize denser ingredients. In my beet salad, I use tangy yogurt and sweet orange juice to lighten things up. And for my fennel and citrus

salad, a whole lemon is blanched and whizzed in a blender for a tart-bitter purée. I also put a twist on the standard chicory salad by topping it with a fried ginger-shallot crumble that adds both texture and spiciness.

But I haven't sworn off warm roasted root vegetables altogether, despite their perceived heaviness. Sometimes I'll use small ones, which are usually more tender and less fibrous than their older brethren. I like to blacken little daikon, kohlrabi, parsnips, and turnips in their skins in a pan, which lends a nice bitterness to the sweet vegetable juices that seep out during cooking. I place them on a bed of beautiful red quinoa, along with pickled shallots, and sprinkle on some lemon zest. It's a real soulful dish with plenty of flavors, colors, and textures at play. There may be less variety in the market in this season, but it forces you to dig deeper and get more intimate with what is there. You can add pickles and citrus, crunchy ginger bits and yogurt—there's a whole bright world out there for winter produce.

Chicory and Herb Salad with Apple, Pomegranate, and Creamy Miso Dressing

Serves 6 to 8
Total: 45 min.

Shiso, mint, and cilantro perk up lightly bitter chicory in this invigorating Asian-inflected green salad tossed with creamy miso dressing and pomegranate seeds.

It gets a double dose of spice with ginger-beer-soaked apples and a mixture of fried ginger and shallots subbing in for croutons.

- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 3 shallots, minced
- One 4-inch piece ginger, peeled and minced
- 1 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp. bottled yuzu juice (igourmet.com)
- 1 tsp. white miso
- 1 large egg plus 1 egg yolk
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar

- 1 Tbsp. rice wine vinegar
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 2 tsp. Asian chile oil
- 2 Fuji apples, peeled, quartered, cored, and cut into 1/4-inch cubes
- One 16-oz. bottle ginger beer
- 1 cup pomegranate seeds
- 3 heads of chicory, cleaned, trimmed, and torn into large pieces
- 1/2 cup loosely packed cilantro leaves



- 1/2 cup loosely packed mint leaves
- 1/2 cup loosely packed torn shiso leaves

1 In a small saucepan, heat the vegetable oil over medium-high. Add the shallots and ginger and cook, stirring, until lightly golden, about 5 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove the shallots and ginger and drain on paper towels; discard the oil.

2 In a blender, combine the Dijon with the yuzu juice, miso, and egg and yolk and blend on low for 2 minutes. Pour in both vinegars and the garlic. Season with salt and pepper and blend on low until smooth, about 30 seconds more. With the motor running, slowly drizzle in olive oil until emulsified. Scrape the dressing into a bowl and stir in the Parmigiano and chile oil.

3 Meanwhile, in a small bowl, combine the apples with the ginger beer and let stand for 10 minutes. Drain the apples and discard the ginger beer. Place the apples in a large serving bowl along with half the dressing and the pomegranate seeds. Add the chicory, cilantro, mint, and shiso and toss gently to combine. Sprinkle the salad with the shallot-ginger topping and serve with the remaining dressing on the side.

Three-Beet Salad with Orange-Yogurt Dressing

Serves 4 to 6

Active: 45 min.; Total: 2 hr. 15 min.

In this bold salad, roasted, pickled, and raw beets tangle with a creamy orange-yogurt dressing. Be sure to combine the ingredients just before serving so the color of the red beets doesn't bleed into the color of the yellow beets.

- 1 large red beet (about 1 lb.)
- 1/2 cup plus 3 Tbsp. sherry vinegar
- 1 head of garlic, halved crosswise
- 1 bunch thyme
- 1 Tbsp. kosher salt, plus more
- 1 small shallot, minced
- Finely grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
- Finely grated zest and segments of 1 orange (see page 76), plus 1/3 cup fresh orange juice
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 2 tsp. freshly grated horseradish
- Freshly cracked black pepper
- 1 lb. golden baby beets, trimmed and thinly sliced, lengthwise

- 1/4 cup champagne vinegar
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 1 Tbsp. sugar
- 4 baby chioggia beets (about 6 oz.), trimmed and scrubbed clean

1 Heat the oven to 300°. In an 8-inch baking dish, combine the red beet with 3 tablespoons sherry vinegar, the garlic, thyme, and 1 cup water and season with salt. Cover the dish with foil and bake the beet until tender, about 1 hour 30 minutes. Transfer the baking dish to a rack and let the beet cool. Peel and quarter the beet, and cut the quarters crosswise into 1 1/2-inch pieces; discard the cooking liquid.

2 In a small bowl, mix the remaining 1/2 cup sherry vinegar with the shallot, lemon zest and juice, half the orange zest, and all the orange segments. Stir in the olive oil and then stir in the roasted beet pieces and toss to combine.

3 On a cutting board, sprinkle the garlic with a pinch of salt and, using the side of your knife, press and mash the garlic with the salt into a smooth paste. Scrape the garlic into a bowl and stir in the remaining orange zest along with the orange juice, yogurt, and horseradish. Season the dressing with salt and pepper.

4 Place the sliced golden beets in a medium bowl. In a small saucepan, bring the 1 tablespoon salt, the champagne vinegar, white wine, sugar, and 1/4 cup water to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Pour the vinegar over the beets and let cool completely.

5 Spread the yogurt dressing into an even layer on a serving platter and top with the roasted beets followed by the pickled beets. Using a mando-

lin or vegetable peeler, shave the chioggia beets over the top and sprinkle with more cracked pepper before serving.

Fennel and Citrus Salad with Charred Squid

Serves 4 to 6;  Page 16

Total: 50 min.

The zest and segments, sometimes called supremes (see page 76), of four types of in-season citrus enliven shaved fennel and charred squid in this winter salad. The dressing is made with the citrus juices and an entire puréed poached lemon. Sugar tames the lemon's bitterness while the peel and pith add a tingly bite.

- 1 whole lemon, plus the finely grated zest and segments of 2 lemons, juices reserved
- 1 cup plus 2 tsp. sugar





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Finely grated zest and segments of 2 grapefruits, 2 oranges, and 1 lime, juices reserved

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 fennel bulb, halved, cored, and thinly sliced

$\frac{1}{2}$ small red onion, thinly sliced

12 oz. cleaned squid bodies and tentacles, bodies cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch rings

1 In a small saucepan, cover the whole lemon with water and bring to a boil. Drain the lemon, return it to the pan and repeat

boiling the lemon two more times with fresh water and drain. In the saucepan, bring the lemon, 1 cup sugar, and 2 cups water to a boil and cook for 3 minutes. Transfer the lemon to a blender along with 6 tablespoons of the syrup and purée until smooth; discard the remaining syrup. Pour and press the purée through a fine sieve into a bowl and discard the solids. Stir the remaining 2 teaspoons sugar into the purée along with all the citrus zests and juices and 3 tablespoons of the olive oil. Season the vinaigrette with salt and pepper.

2 In a large bowl, cover the fennel and onion with ice water and let stand for 10 minutes. Drain and transfer to paper towels

to dry thoroughly. Transfer the fennel and onion to the bowl with the vinaigrette and toss to combine. Lift the fennel and onion from the dressing and transfer to a large serving platter. Arrange all the citrus segments evenly over the fennel and onion and drizzle the remaining vinaigrette over the top.

3 Heat a 12-inch cast-iron skillet over high for 5 minutes. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil and swirl the skillet to coat. Add the squid and cook, without stirring, until lightly charred, about 6 minutes. Remove the skillet from the heat, spoon the squid over the salad, and serve immediately.

Pucker Up

The puréed poached lemon in this fennel and citrus salad with charred squid (see page 14 for recipe) would also be great as a topping for grilled lamb or sweet roasted vegetables.





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Root Vegetable and Quinoa Salad with Pickled Sunchokes

Serves 4 to 6

Active: 1 hr. 40 min.; Total: 10 hr.

Red quinoa, which is similar in flavor and texture to white quinoa, adds color to this warm, hearty salad, and pickled sunchokes offer a snappy counterpoint to the roasted root vegetables.

- 6 Tbsp. kosher salt, plus more
- 8 oz. sunchokes, unpeeled and cut into 1/4-inch-thick batons

- 1 tsp. celery seeds
- 1 tsp. whole black peppercorns
- 1 cup champagne vinegar
- 1/2 cup white wine vinegar
- 2 Tbsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. Aleppo pepper
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 4 baby carrots, scrubbed clean
- 4 each red radishes, small kohlrabi, small parsnips and small turnips, halved
- 2 small daikon radishes, halved and cut crosswise into 1/2-inch slices
- 1 head of garlic, halved

- 1 bunch thyme
- 1/2 cup red quinoa, rinsed
- 4 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1/2 tsp. fish sauce
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Juice and finely grated zest of 1 lemon

1 In a medium saucepan, bring 4 tablespoons salt and 4 cups water to a boil, stirring to dissolve the salt. Remove the pan from the heat and let cool. Pour the salt water into a bowl, stir in the sunchokes, and refrigerate at least 8 hours or overnight. The next day, drain the sunchokes and return to the bowl. In a medium saucepan, toast the celery seeds and peppercorns over medium-high heat until fragrant, about 1 minute. Pour in 2 tablespoons salt along with both vinegars, the sugar, Aleppo pepper, garlic, and bay leaf and bring to a boil. Pour the brine over the sunchokes, let cool completely, and then cover and refrigerate at least 8 hours or up to 2 weeks.

2 In an 8-qt. saucepan, heat the olive oil over medium-high. Add the carrots to the oil, cut sides down, and cook, without turning, until dark golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the carrots to a plate. Repeat cooking the red radishes, kohlrabi, parsnips, turnips, and daikon in individual batches until all the vegetables are browned. Add the garlic halves, cut sides down, to the oil and cook until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Flip the garlic halves and return all the browned vegetables to the pan along with the thyme and 2 cups water. Season with salt and bring the water to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a steady simmer and cook, covered, until the vegetables are tender, about 20 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, lift the vegetables from the pan and transfer to a large plate; discard the garlic halves and thyme. Return the pan to the heat, bring to a boil, and cook until the liquid reduces to 2 tablespoons, about 12 minutes. Pour the liquid into a small bowl and let cool.

3 In a small saucepan, combine the quinoa with 1 cup water and season with salt. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium-low, and cook the quinoa, covered, until tender, 12 to 15 minutes. Scrape the cooked quinoa into a bowl and let cool.

4 In a small skillet, brown the butter over medium heat. Pour the butter through a fine sieve into the bowl with the reduced cooking liquid. Stir in the fish sauce and season the dressing with pepper. Pour half the dressing over the quinoa along with the lemon zest and juice and toss to combine. Transfer the quinoa to a serving platter and arrange the vegetables over the top. Drizzle with the remaining dressing and top with the sunchokes before serving.

Crémant d'Alsace, *Celebration in a Bottle*



During the holiday season, Alsace is transformed into a storybook, winter wonderland. Small villages and their half-timbered houses are dusted in snow, their center squares bursting to life with picturesque Christmas markets. So it's no surprise that this French wine region, nestled between the Vosges Mountains and Rhine River, is a destination for tourists near and far.

Besides the charming scenery, Alsace is also known for producing **Crémant d'Alsace**; bubbly that are as festive as the region's holiday markets. As one of the top selling sparkling wines in France, Crémant d'Alsace undoubtedly has its fair share of fans within its homeland, and for good reason. These elegant sparklers are made in the traditional method but can usually be found for \$25 or less.

Crémant d'Alsace also uses classic grape varieties such as Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The former is the only red grape variety allowed to make these food-friendly sparkling rosés, while the latter is strictly grown for Crémant production. But more often than not, the region's signature aromatic grapes—Pinot Blanc, Riesling and Pinot Gris—comprise the white blends.

Vibrant and dry, every pop of the cork brings refined effervescence, complex flavors and exuberance to match the spirit of the season. From complementing a wide array of dishes, toasting at large parties or thanking any host, Crémant d'Alsace is the final touch that makes celebrations sparkle.



For more information on Crémant d'Alsace, visit WinesofAlsace.com.

Pennsylvania Gold

NOT ALL SAFFRON IS IMPORTED. IN LANCASTER COUNTY'S HORSE-AND-BUGGY COMMUNITIES, HOMEGROWN SAFFRON IS AN EVERYDAY INGREDIENT

Story and Photographs by Andy Isaacson



Centuries-old traditions prevail in this rural pocket of Pennsylvania, where carriages and tall black hats are as common a sight as trucks, cars, and baseball caps.

It's been an exalted ingredient of Iranian cuisine since ancient times. It lends its distinctive hue and pungent flavor to Spanish paella, Afghani *pulao*, and the fragrant couscous of Morocco. In Sweden, they put a pinch of it in sweet yeast buns called *Saffransbröd*. And here in the horse-and-buggy counties of southeastern Pennsylvania, the dried red stigma of the autumn-flowering *Crocus sativus* finds its way into just about everything Justin Hulshizer puts on the dinner table.

"Until I was twenty-one, I didn't know that all chicken potpies and bread stuffing weren't colored yellow," Hulshizer says, serving me a plate of yellow scalloped potatoes baked with saffron.

Hulshizer and his neighbors are descendants of Pennsylvania Dutch (from *deutsch*, or German-speaking) Mennonites who settled the area some 300 years ago, and a love of saffron still runs through their kitchens, though few bother to grow it anymore. Hulshizer is one of the last of the holdouts, growing saffron corms in seven raised beds over the cement driveway beside his red-brick house.

The spice came to the U.S. during Colonial times along with other old-world crops like spelt. According to food historian William Woys Weaver, saffron-loving Pennsylvanians were once called *Geeldeitsch*, or "Yellow Dutch," for the distinctive

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gold hue of their food. Merchants shipped Pennsylvania saffron to Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and, writes Pat Willard, author of *Secrets of Saffron: The Vagabond Life of the World's Most Seductive Spice*, in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, saffron traded on the Philadelphia commodity exchange at a price equal to gold. In the colonies, saffron acted as a flavoring in soups and teas, as well as a domestic remedy for measles and fevers.

The Hulshizers own neither horses nor buggies—Justin is a caseworker at the state's department of human services—but around the 12-person table at his parents' home a few miles from his own, a centuries-old food tradition endures. In addition to those potatoes, a bowl of fresh egg-noodle chicken soup is laced with Hulshizer's own saffron, grown mainly for

October send up shoots that soon after bloom lovely purple-lilac flowers. Each flower yields just three threadlike stigmas, which Hulshizer and his kids pluck in the early morning, just as Merla did, before the flowers wither under the sun. Harvest is “a mad, crazy affair for two weeks,” Hulshizer says. He then dries the saffron threads in a convection toaster for two minutes, which activates the oils and heightens the aroma. (The traditional Spanish drying method involves toasting over spent charcoal fire.) His seven beds produce 10 to 15 grams of saffron per season. Low yield and intensive labor account for saffron's high cost: It takes the stigmas of around 70,000 blossoms, roughly an acre of flowers, to produce just one pound.

It's all, admittedly, a bit of a pain. The cold, damp winters of late caused many of Hulshizer's corms to rot under-

The crimson threads imbue each spoonful with a golden hue and complex flavor, faintly marine, faintly honeyed

his own kitchen (though a few years ago, after an unexpected bumper crop, some threads made their way to the Pennsylvania General Store and were quickly scooped up by locals and chefs). The crimson threads imbue each spoonful of soup with a saturated golden hue and a complex flavor, earthy and faintly honeyed to some, marine or floral to others. It's a versatile ingredient, and he says he sometimes adds it to cakes or cookies as well as savory preparations.

Most recipes advise sparing use of this expensive spice, but Hulshizer can't help himself.

“Justin will often make soup, and the next day when he reheats it he'll add more saffron, thinking there's not enough,” his wife, Louise, tells me, with a smile.

“It's because we love it,” pipes up Sofia, the Hulshizers' nine-year-old.

Hulshizer recalls his grandmother Merla using the saffron she raised in her garden in everything from stuffing to broths to the salted chicken hearts she'd make him as an afternoon snack. After Merla moved out of her house and into a nursing home, she insisted that Hulshizer take her saffron corms—which resemble tulip bulbs and reproduce by spawning smaller, daughter corms that can be detached, like garlic cloves, and replanted—and start a crop of his own.

Saffron corms are dug up and divided in July, and in mid-



Late afternoon in Lititz, Pennsylvania, at the Forgiven Seasons B&B, run by Jay and Kathy Wenger. Kathy's mother, Ruth Zimmerman Martin, practically gives away saffron bulbs for ten cents each in an effort to encourage other women to take up saffron cultivation.

ground. There's also the perennial threat of rabbits chomping off fresh shoots and vermin mining the soil. The country's last known commercial saffron grower, Martin Keen, a seventh-generation farmer who cultivated the plant for over a decade, told me that he simply gave up selling it commercially after voles wiped out his crop 11 years ago. Now, individuals like Hulshizer who grow it in their own gardens keep the tradition of Pennsylvania saffron alive, representing, with each harvested corm, a vestige of a fading American foodway.

One such Lancaster County resident, Marilyn Weaver, a retired woman I met in Brickerville who was advertising saffron bulbs for sale on her front lawn, explained that absent the golden blush of saffron, “chicken looks anemic.” Lee Stolz, a retired antiques dealer in Lititz who, 30 years ago, founded the Heirloom Seed Project to preserve heirloom varieties of vegetables with historical significance for the Pennsylvania Dutch and took

up saffron growing himself as a way of celebrating his roots, told me, “It's kind of like our little secret.”

And for some locals, cooking with saffron “almost gives you a feather in your cap,” says Kathy Wenger, who runs the Forgiven Seasons B&B in Lititz. “Like you're a real Pennsylvania Dutch cook.” ■



Roasted Chicken, Corn, and Saffron Soup

Serves 8 to 10

Active: 45 min.; Total: 2 hr.

Lancaster County local Justin Hulshizer likes to add a hefty dose of saffron to perfume this chicken noodle soup, sweetened lightly with corn. You can start with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon and add more as you wish. Saffron is widely cultivated in Spain and Iran, but some chefs prefer the domestic variety because they can receive it closer to the harvest, when its signature flavor and color are at their most vibrant. Check pageneralstore.com, which sources and ships Lancaster County saffron when available.

- One** 3- to 4-lb. whole chicken
- 2** Tbsp. olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 12** cups chicken stock
- 4** cups frozen corn kernels, thawed
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. crushed saffron threads
- 12** oz. egg noodles
- Crusty white bread, for serving

1 Heat the oven to 400°. In a 9-by-13-inch baking dish, rub the chicken with the olive oil and then liberally season the outside with salt and pepper. Roast the chicken until golden brown and very tender, about 1 hour and 15 minutes. Transfer the dish to a rack, lift the chicken from the dish, and place the chicken on a cutting board. Let the chicken stand until cool enough to handle and then pick the meat from the chicken, discarding the skin and bones. Roughly chop the meat and transfer to a large saucepan.

2 Pour 2 cups chicken stock into the baking dish and scrape the dish with a wooden spoon to deglaze the bottom. Pour the stock from the dish into the saucepan with the chicken along with the remaining 10 cups stock. Add the corn and saffron to the broth and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook until the stock is slightly reduced, about 15 minutes.

3 Add the egg noodles and cook, stirring, until al dente, about 8 minutes. Season the soup with salt and pepper and serve with crusty bread on the side for soaking up the flavorful broth.



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Beans Are Beautiful

ON THE COMFORTING PLEASURES OF THE HUMBLE *PHASEOLUS VULGARIS*

Story and Recipes by David Tanis

Did I mention I love beans? Love. I fell hard for them years ago. It was a humble pot of pinto beans that did it, and there was no turning back.

Those fabled pintos were my induction into the glory of *Phaseolus vulgaris*—the common bean. Simmered slowly and gently with an onion and a chunk of bacon, the beans took on a velvety, creamy consistency. They were served on a plate with a ladleful of rich bean broth and a square of just-baked cornbread. This was nothing like cafeteria three-bean salad, or the sweet baked beans from a can I'd been served as a kid. This was deep, nurturing, primal.

From there it was an easy step to black beans with onions and cilantro or smashed cannellini beans on toasted garlic bread. And every other kind of bean in every kind of fashion.

When I ran a restaurant in Santa Fe, we bought dried beans from the most famous farmer in the area, Elizabeth Berry. All the beans she grew were decidedly uncommon. There were dozens of varieties, simply staggering to observe, with paint-speckled exteriors in unbelievable jewel-like hues. The multi-colored beans have names like Anasazi or Jacob's Cattle or Appaloosa. Calypso, or Goat's Eye (Ojo de Cabra), Snowcap, Orca, Dragon Tongue. All make a fine pot of beans, each a distinct, singular dish. Sadly, though, when cooked, all the incredible markings disappear, losing their color to the broth.

A quick overview on the life of a bean: A dried bean is planted in the spring. In the warm moist soil, a tiny but sturdy bean sprout emerges, its leaves unfurling fiercely in a primordial gesture. Warm weather and sunshine cause the bean vines to make

flowers, which become little green pods. If allowed to stay on the vine past the green-bean stage to maturity, the beans within the pods become full-size shelling beans. You start seeing many of them at the market in mid to late summer—cranberry beans, butter beans, fresh cannellini, and other types. These cook more quickly than dried beans and have the loveliest creamy texture. But when the pod is left to dry, its contents become wintertime meals and next year's seeds.

The main thing to know about cooking dried beans is that new-crop beans taste fresher and cook more evenly than beans of uncertain vintage, like the commodity beans sold at the supermarket, where they have lain for who knows how long. It's better to buy your dried beans at a farmers' market or online from Rancho Gordo or Purcell Mountain Farms. You'll pay a little more for these heirloom varieties, but even a splurge on good beans will never break the bank.

For a winter meal, beans are perfect, whether in a savory bread-crumble-topped bean gratin; in a pasta finished in bean broth with rosemary, olive oil, and a little pork fat for deeper flavor; as a creamy bean soup with wilted greens; or as a salad, dressed with oil, vinegar, and red onion. These are all dishes that deserve spending a bit more for a pound bag of beans, the main and most important ingredient.

As for canned beans, they have their place, I suppose, like during emergencies or on a camping trip. Yes, they're convenient, but their flavor never satisfies like beans cooked from scratch. I always visualize a giant impersonal bean-canning factory, with tons of hair-netted workers operating the hulking machines that deposit 14 ounces of beans into hundreds of cans per minute on a conveyor belt that stretches far into the distance.

Me? I far prefer the notion of nursed-along beans at home. It's a love thing. ■

Cannellini Bean Salad with Radicchio and Celery

Serves 6 to 8

Active: 25 min.; Total: 1 hr. 20 min.

A bean salad can be wonderful, particularly when dressed with a zippy vinaigrette. For this winter version, radicchio and celery add crunch and texture. In summer, replace them with briefly blanched haricots verts and halved cherry tomatoes.

- 1½ cups dried cannellini beans, soaked overnight and drained**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar**
- ½ red onion, finely chopped**
- 2 tsp. Dijon mustard**
- 2 anchovy fillets in oil, drained and finely chopped**
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 3 Tbsp. roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley**
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced**
- 4 celery stalks, finely chopped**
- 1 head radicchio, quartered and cored, leaves separated and torn in half**

1 In a 4-qt. saucepan, combine the beans with 6 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook the beans until tender, about 45 minutes. Drain the beans, transfer to a bowl, and season with salt and pepper.

2 On a cutting board, using the side of your knife, press and smash the garlic with a pinch of salt until it forms a smooth paste. Scrape the paste into a bowl and stir in the vinegar and onion. Let the onions stand for 10 minutes and then whisk in the mustard and anchovies. While whisking, slowly drizzle in the olive oil until the dressing emulsifies and then season with salt and pepper. Reserve ¼ cup of the dressing and pour the remaining over the beans and toss to coat evenly.

3 In a small bowl, toss the reserved ¼ cup dressing with the parsley, scallions, and celery and season with salt and pepper. On a large serving platter, arrange the radicchio in a single layer and top with the beans. Spoon the celery and scallions on top and serve immediately.





Whether cooked into a hearty pasta e fagioli (left), or puréed into a soup (below, see page 27 for recipe), beans' comforting creaminess forms the building block for myriad wintertime dishes.

Pasta e Fagioli

Serves 4 to 6

Active: 45 min.; Total: 1 hr. 45 min.

The robust Italian soup called pasta e fagioli is most often served as soupy beans with a small amount of pasta stirred in. As wonderful as it is, sometimes I like to reverse the order and turn it into a pasta dish smothered in beans. Bean broth and pasta water make the creamy, savory sauce, along with olive oil and a little pancetta.

- 2 cups dried cranberry beans, soaked overnight and drained
- 6 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 small yellow onions, finely chopped
- 4 oz. pancetta, cut crosswise into 1/4-inch pieces
- 1/4 tsp. crushed red chile flakes
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 8 oz. orecchiette pasta
- 1 cup grated Pecorino Romano, plus more for serving
- 1/4 cup finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tsp. minced rosemary

1 In a 4-qt. saucepan, combine the beans with 6 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook the beans until tender, about 1 hour. Drain the beans and reserve 1 cup of their cooking liquid.

2 Rinse and wipe out the pan and return to medium heat. Heat the olive oil, add the

onions, and cook until soft, about 10 minutes. Stir in the pancetta, chile flakes, and garlic. Season with salt and pepper and cook until the pancetta is just cooked but not crisp, about 5 minutes. Gently stir in the beans and their cooking liquid and cook until heated through, about 2 minutes.

3 Meanwhile, in a pan of boiling salted water, cook the pasta until al dente, about 10 minutes. Drain the pasta and reserve 1/2 cup pasta water. Stir the pasta and 1/4 cup of the pasta water into the beans and cook until warmed through, about 2 minutes (add the remaining pasta water if needed to make a creamy sauce). Stir in the pecorino, parsley, and rosemary and serve with more pecorino on the side.





Lima Bean Gratin with Herbed Bread Crumbs

Serves 6 to 8

Active: 35 min.; Total: 3 hr. 15 min.

These are savory baked beans, but they have no Boston sweetness. Think of this gratin as a meatless cassoulet meant to accompany a roast, or, if you're a true bean lover like me, a good green salad. It can be made with fresh shelling beans, including lima or cranberry, or any large dried white beans.

For the beans:

- 3 cups dried Peruvian lima beans, soaked overnight and drained**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 large yellow onion, finely chopped**
- ½ tsp. crushed red chile flakes**
- ½ tsp. whole fennel seeds, coarsely crushed**
- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

For the bread crumbs:

- 4 garlic cloves, minced**
- Kosher salt**
- 6 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ cup minced flat-leaf parsley**
- 1 Tbsp. plus 1 tsp. minced sage**
- 1 Tbsp. plus 1 tsp. minced thyme**
- 2 tsp. minced rosemary**
- 4 cups coarse homemade bread crumbs, from a day-old French loaf**
- ½ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano**
- Freshly ground black pepper**

1 Make the beans: In a 4-qt. saucepan, combine the beans with 6 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook the beans until tender, about 45 minutes. Drain the beans and reserve 3 cups of their cooking liquid.

2 Heat the oven to 350°. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 10 minutes. Add the chile flakes,

fennel seeds, and garlic. Season with salt and pepper and remove from the heat. Scrape the onions into the bowl with the beans and stir to combine. Season the beans with salt and pepper and spoon into a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Pour the reserved cooking liquid over the beans.

3 Make the bread crumbs: On a cutting board, using the side of your knife, press and smash the garlic with a pinch of salt until it forms a smooth paste. Scrape the paste into a bowl and stir in the olive oil, parsley, sage, thyme, and rosemary. Add the bread crumbs and Parmigiano, season with salt and pepper, and toss until evenly combined.

4 Sprinkle the bread crumbs evenly over the beans (don't compact them) and cover the dish with foil. Bake for 45 minutes, remove the foil, and continue baking until the beans are bubbling in the center and the bread crumbs are golden brown, about 1 hour. Remove the baking dish from the oven and let the beans stand for 10 minutes before serving.

White Bean Soup with Fennel Seeds and Broccoli Rabe

Serves 6 to 8; Page 26

Active: 40 min.; Total: 1 hr. 30 min.

This kind of luscious puréed bean soup is made all over Italy with white beans or fava beans. It can be made a day or two in advance, but cook the greens just before serving.

- 2 ½ cups dried Great Northern white beans, soaked overnight and drained**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling**
- ½ tsp. whole fennel seeds, coarsely crushed**

- 1 large yellow onion, finely chopped**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 lb. broccoli rabe, dandelion greens, or Swiss chard, cut into 2-inch pieces**
- ¼ tsp. crushed red chile flakes**
- 4 garlic cloves, minced**

1 In a 4-qt. saucepan, combine the beans with 6 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook the beans until just tender, about 20 minutes. Drain the beans and reserve 2 cups of their cooking liquid.

2 In a large saucepan, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium. Add the fennel seeds and onion and cook, stirring, until soft, about 10 minutes. Stir in the beans and 6 cups fresh water, season with salt and pepper, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer and cook until the beans are falling apart, about 25 minutes. Using an immersion blender or working in batches with a standard blender, purée the soup until smooth. Stir in the reserved cooking liquid, season with salt and pepper, and keep warm.

3 Meanwhile, in a pot of boiling salted water, cook the broccoli rabe until crisp-tender and bright green, about 2 minutes. Drain the broccoli rabe and transfer to a bowl.

4 In a medium skillet, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium-high. Add the chile flakes and garlic and cook for 2 minutes. Stir in the broccoli rabe, season with salt and pepper, and cook until warmed through, about 2 minutes. Divide the soup among bowls and top each with some of the broccoli rabe and a drizzle of more olive oil before serving.





In an open-air pavilion, students who work on the Yale Farm slice freshly picked vegetables for pizza toppings.

Yale's Pizza Prodigies

IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, HOME TO SOME OF THE MOST STORIED PIZZERIAS IN AMERICA, IVY LEAGUE UPSTARTS ARE MAKING HOMEGROWN PIES AND CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO

By Howie Kahn

Photographs by Matt Taylor-Gross

Recently, I found myself in lower Manhattan eating finger food and clinking glasses with Jonathan Holloway, the dean of Yale College at Yale University. We should have been talking about the reason for the swanky gathering: a fund-raiser for René Redzepi's Danish nonprofit culinary think tank, MAD, and its new partnership with Yale to launch a leadership institute for ambitious chefs intent on im-

proving food systems around the globe. Redzepi himself was visible in the open kitchen, preparing dinner along with Roy Choi, Daniel Patterson, and Dan Barber. And I also meant to ask Holloway, a brilliant scholar of African-American history, about his own work. Instead, thinking of New Haven, Connecticut, my thoughts turned, naturally, to pizza.

"What's your favorite?" I asked.

Holloway responded with something shocking, the kind of

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Gorgeous produce makes for creative pizzas, like the Beet-za (above) topped with beets, ricotta, and sage. The dough for the pizzas is fermented overnight and cooked at a blazing 750 degrees in a handmade brick-clay oven.

secret-sounding inside tip you always hope to get, but rarely do.

"I think the best pizza in New Haven," he said, with professorial gravitas, "is actually at Yale Farm."

Coupling the word "best" with the word "pizza" marks a serious commitment in any city, but even more so in New Haven. Pizzerias there, like Frank Pepe, Modern, and Sally's, date to the 1920s and 1930s and are revered as pilgrimage sites. Known for their mostly coal-fired ovens and inimitable crusts (neither fully cracker-like nor bread-like, but a perfect hybrid of the two), these institutions are a mecca for mozzarella, or, as the locals say, "mootz." So the existence of another power pizza player in town—a relatively unknown contender, staffed by students on the campus of an Ivy League university—sounded far-fetched, but entirely appealing. On the one hand, Holloway may have been simply stumping for his school. On the other, he seemed to really mean it, recognizing that pizza offers its own

category of scholarship and that superlatives must be backed by rigorous research. Dialectic aside, only one response felt appropriate: an immediate visit.

On approach, the Yale pizza-making operation looks like a detail from a Hudson River School painting about the romance of proofing dough and slicing toppings. It sits on a ridge beneath an open-air pavilion with a flat roof. The oven, built in 2005 by a family of artisans from Maine, is sizable—brick on the outside, Le Panyol clay on the inside—and flanked by a generous prep area where sage is bundled, lemons are zested, and beets are sliced into bright, thin rounds. Below, separated from the kitchen by a grassy, sloping berm, are the farm's long, lush rows of growing greens, grains, and herbs. In the background, towering trees flash their peak fall colors while sunshine filters through the boughs. Holy things happen here, is what the space seems to be saying. It's a good sign, since all pizza joints of significance say something like this.

The genesis of the one-acre Yale Farm dates to 2000, when students began rallying around the idea of making their university's campus dining program more organic. The Yale Sustainable Food Project, which runs the farm, was founded the next year. Their agenda soon became a full-blown movement and got a substantial boost when the concerned mother of a newly enrolled student helped to amplify their voices. The mother was Alice Waters, and with her as an advocate, students broke ground on the farm in 2003. Their hearth was completed not long after. Pizza making happens ritualistically on Fridays in the fall and spring, mainly to feed student employees and volunteers who help with farm chores like harvesting, planting, and chicken-rearing.

While the notion of communal pizza eating is as central to college life as late-night cramming and mishaps with beer and laundry, the Yale Farm version is conducted with significantly greater depth. Ordering a pie, scrounging for cash to pay for it, and then grabbing for greasy slices from a cardboard box this is not. Instead, over the past ten years, students at Yale have developed a pizza protocol worthy of their high-minded institution.

Standing at the oven's mouth is Ariana Shapiro (Ethnicity, Race, and Migration major, class of 2016), wearing a lavender bandana fashioned into a headband and a T-shirt that reads KALE, the farm uniform, printed in the same font as university souvenirs that say YALE. With a grant from the Yale Sustainable

Food Program, Shapiro attended the Kneading Conference in Skowhegan, Maine, a workshop focusing on baking and the appreciation of lost grains, last summer. She developed the current Yale Farm pizza dough recipe when she returned to campus. One of 35 students accepted to help operate the farm, Shapiro does it as part of her work-study program for \$12.50 an hour. According to Jacqueline Munno, the farm's 33-year-old programs manager (otherwise known to students as the Professor of Pizza), farm jobs become more coveted every year as food awareness becomes a greater part of student life. "We're only able to accept six percent of applicants," says Munno. "It's as competitive as getting into Yale."

After throwing another log in the fire, Shapiro gets to work completing the dough. She began making it the night before at home, mixing white and wheat flours with water and a pinch of yeast to create a dough that could ferment overnight, thereby adding a deeper level of flavor to the finished crust. Combining small chunks of the preferment with a larger batch of the same ingredients, plus olive oil and salt, Shapiro begins to knead with the virtuosity of a seasoned pizza maker. "The gluten is developing nicely," she says.

For the next two hours, the dough rests (halfway through, it's folded a few times). Afterward it's divided into balls for an hour of proofing. When the dough is ready, the remainder of the farm staff, other students with their own KALE T-shirts, fleece jackets, and determined outlooks on pizza quality, gathers around a large prep table in front of the hearth. Shapiro measures its temperature with an infrared thermometer: 750 degrees on the deck.

As a way of linking old-world New Haven pizza making to the work at Yale for the first time, I invited pizzaiolo Gary Bimonte, the 55-year-old grandson of Frank Pepe and de facto standard-bearer of the classic style, to the farm to vet the situation. As soon as he arrives, his eyes go wide with appreciation. "This is just awesome," he says, checking out the oven, sampling the pre-roasted toppings, discussing craft with Shapiro, who holds her own at every turn. "This is just awesome," he repeats.

With the sun starting to dip, the pizzas are ready for the fire. The toppings have been applied with artful symmetry. There are ribbons of squash that rotate around one pie like spokes on a wheel. On another, beet slices and dark green sage leaves mingle

atop a layer of ricotta, evoking playful painterly gestures against a white canvas.

Shapiro works the hearth and her peel with preternatural skill and concentration. Each of her pies takes between 30 and 120 seconds to cook, so her speed, turning each one in the oven to ensure its evenness, is critical, too. One after another, the hot, chewy pizzas hit the table. Bimonte admires the crust. "Thin," he says, "but with that breadiness, too." Again he pronounces it awesome.

Shapiro removes a clam-and-pesto number from the oven and readies a Margherita pie for the heat. Clutching her peel, she muses on where the Yale Farm program fits into the dogma of the New Haven pizza scene. A tradition of care and artisanship has developed here, too, she says, but by nature a university fosters a more progressive approach. "There's going to be less institutional memory here," she says, peering into the embers. "New people will run this oven every year, so our style will always evolve." ■

While communal pizza eating is as central to college life as late-night cramming, this version is done with significantly greater depth



In an ode to New Haven's famed clam pies, Yale students make their own variety using clams from the Thimble Islands, parsley pesto, and lemon zest.

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The author (right) and Antonio "Sunny" Raffaele Balzano at the onetime longshoreman bar that Balzano's great-grandfather opened a century ago in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

Not Everybody Comes to Sunny's

Twenty years ago, a writer walked down a dark block of then desolate waterfront Brooklyn—and found himself at home in an old longshoreman's saloon, where a singular bartender played host (one night a week) to a loyal community of tugboat captains, wise guys, and everyday eccentrics

By Tim Sultan

The bar counter was charred in places where cigarettes had been stubbed out. A painting of a horse hung on one wall in a spot where over time just enough sunlight must have fallen to bleach the head out: a headless horse in a nameless bar. A hook, which looked as though it once served as someone's prosthetic hand, dangled from a chain of Christmas lights. And high

above the bar sat several model ships in glass cases. There were no pinball chimes, no televisions turned to hockey, no machines at all (other than the projector and the stereo tucked somewhere behind the counter on which Julie London was now singing). The letters AVENUE P pointed the way to the bathroom, but there was no signage that would give away the year or the decade we were in. Only the clothes of

the customers revealed the era, and then only fitfully. The bar looked old and worn but not in the overly careful manner of certain New York saloons where amber beer seems to take on a whole new meaning.

My eyes came to rest on the barkeep. He was laughing, chatting, smoking as he made his way along his side of the bar with my next Rheingold. From a distance, he looked vaguely Native American, like Chief Dan George of *Little Big Man* fame. But he also resembled Tony Bennett, if Tony Bennett had last seen a barber in 1957. Up close, I decided that if one took Tiny Tim's hair and put it on Gertrude Stein's face, one would get a very good likeness of this man. From what little I had heard of his voice, he sounded kind of Irish, but when my beer arrived and I introduced myself, he said, "My real name is Antonio. Antonio Raffaele Balzano. But please. Call me Sunny." He gripped my hand in both of his and leaned across the bar.

He was tall and very slim but the features on his face were large and rounded as a ship's weathered figurehead. His eyebrows were two silver caterpillars that had come to a halt while walking Indian file across his brow. His fingers were as thick as a stout woman's wrists. In the shadows, he had appeared a little otherworldly and a little epicene—less the ghost of the Ancient Mariner than that of the Mariner's sister. But now he grasped my hand with the vigor and enthusiasm and curiosity of a man coming upon a compatriot after months lost in the jungle. It was a greeting startling in its sincerity and intensity, and one that I would come to see made to others many times.

It expressed: "You belong." To say that he exuded charisma would be like saying Mussolini liked to hear himself talk.

Antonio—Sunny—eventually continued on, stopping to speak with each person or party seated at the bar. I watched him and I watched how everyone else kept an eye on him, as if awaiting a turn to be in his company. He kept a cigarette continuously lit and often tilted his head back to blow plumes of smoke in the air. He sipped whiskey out of shot glasses that looked like thimbles in his hands while telling stories about rats he had slain at various times in his life. Though I only heard snatches, I assumed he meant the kind with whiskers and tails. He recited several lines of what I took to be Shakespeare. He pronounced words in a way I had never heard before. He might say, "I ate a plate of ersters and then I slipped on some erl on my way to the terlet." He used strange words rarely heard in casual conversation, like "verbiage" and "personage." And he

used words strangely, saying for instance, "Within the framework that it is that it is that we're existing in."

I was certain that I had never encountered a more arresting presence.

I soon learned that this bar of Sunny's, the bar with no name and therefore no listing in the phone book, had been in his family since the beginning and he himself had practically been born there. I also learned that it was only open every seventh day, like a roadhouse in the Old Testament. This struck me as less than sound business practice, but the business of running a bar did not appear to be

the business that Sunny was in. I couldn't remember ever meeting someone so free of worry about making money, about rules, about doing things in the accustomed way. I noticed that Sunny carried a remarkably spare stock—a few staples, Romanian vodka, peach and blackberry brandies. Wino liquor. He served wine from cartons, strongly reminiscent of communion wine (though any priest serving Holy Communion with this stuff would quickly have a dwindling parish on his hands). Although there were vestiges of taps, there was no actual draft beer to be had; Sunny explained that he opened too infrequently to keep it fresh. If one was nevertheless dead set on having a beer, he leisurely reached behind him into a wooden cooler built into the back counter, not overly concerned whether it was Budweiser, Rheingold, Heineken, or Schlitz that he fished out. All beers—all

drinks, for that matter—were three dollars at Sunny's. He showed even less concern if a customer, impatient for service, came around the bar and simply helped himself.

Sunny was not in the least proprietary, at least not overtly. If a person expressed admiration or fidelity to his bar, he would say, "My bar? This isn't my bar any more than it's anyone else's bar. It don't belong to me. It belongs to each of you who have come here and have served to make it what it is that it is. It's our bar, aye?" He appeared to mean this in the most sincere way. It was an outlook that emboldened customers to make whatever contribution to the humanities they wished. There weren't always obscure films being projected or ingenious songs being sung, though a bakery-truck driver with a guitar and a Maine accent thicker than Edmund Muskie's usually got up once a Friday and sang of his Long Island route, "You can have it all / Any way you like / You can have it all / On the Jericho



Sunny's casts a warm glow on its quiet cobblestone street, where a rusty green truck is always parked out front.

Turnpike!”—perhaps the most hopeful sentiment about a stretch of road since Nat King Cole first crooned, “You can get your kicks / On Route 66.”

There was a sense that one was off the leash here. The culture that I came upon at Sunny’s was a distinct and self-generated one, as you might expect to find on an island far from any shore. If a stocky biker named Ross wanted to stand in the middle of the room and play two trumpets simultaneously, sounding less like Rahsaan Roland Kirk than a subway car’s brakes thirsting for oil, Sunny was unperturbed. If a chauffeur wanted to noisily recite Harold Pinter (“You have a wonderful casserole ... I mean wife”), Sunny was appreciative. If the rare woman patron, and an adult entertainer no less, wanted to perform an interpretive dance of Aphrodite’s birth wearing something less than pasties, Sunny was understanding. And if a tugboat captain, addressed as Captain Ritchie both on and off the water, decided abruptly to yodel, and yodel very ably at that, Sunny loved it. He loved it because he seemed to love people in an absolutist manner that I had rarely seen. His affection for them, his curiosity about their histories, and his appreciation for their customs and eccentricities were apparent in the way he engaged his patrons and in his habit of extolling their virtues and their vices. He particularly loved vices. He always seemed to be exalting people, whether to their faces, behind their backs, or, as he often did, indirectly while telling a story.

I should have known better than to try and order a Manhattan. Sunny made conversation, not cocktails. He was, in fact, singularly inexpert at bartending

Now, what can I get you, Timmy?” Sunny asked when he finally made his way back to my end of the bar. I had yet to be served but I felt no impatience. No one at Sunny’s, on either side of the bar, was ever in a hurry.

Though usually a beer drinker of indiscriminating taste, impulsively I decided to ask for something different tonight. I ordered the first cocktail that came to mind. “You would like a Manhattan?” Sunny frowned. “Isn’t that like going to Pittsburgh and ordering a Philly cheesesteak? We’re in Brooklyn, Timmy.”

“I hadn’t thought of it that way. Well, what do you think I should have?”

“I’m only bustin’ your balls. You know I’m not a real bartender by any stretch of the imagination and the truth of the matter is that I don’t have the knowledge as how to make a Manhattan. But ... why don’t you have a berlermaker?”

“A berlermaker?”

“Yes. A pour of whiskey into a beer. It’s what the men working longshore used to drink.”

“A boilermaker?”

“That’s what I said, Timmy. A berlermaker,” Sunny said with a grin. “Let me get that for you.”

As I watched Sunny make my boilermaker, pouring Four Roses whiskey into a collins glass and topping it off with Budweiser at a devastating ratio of one-to-one—a drink that would become “my drink” in the same way that I had begun to think of Sunny’s as “my bar”—I thought to myself, not for the last time, that there was something timeless about him. He seemed to be a spirit sentenced to presiding over this bar for perpetuity. A kindlier version of Lloyd, eternity’s bartender in *The Shining*.

I should have known better than to try and order a Manhattan. Sunny made conversation, not cocktails. He was, in fact, singularly inexpert at bartending.

When one night someone asked whether they could have a martini, Sunny replied, “Yes, you may ... but you’re going to have to come around the bar and make it yourself!” So they did.

When he wasn’t outright surrendering the bartending duties to customers, he was improvising as he went along. A wise guy’s mistress once asked whether Sunny had any garnish for the Sex on the Beach she had ordered (God knows what he had put in it). “Certainly,” he replied, without missing a beat and taking one of her bronzed hands into his. “Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs,” he said. “Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers’ eyes. Being vexed, a sea nourished with lovers’ tears.” He paused and gave her a meaningful look. “What is it else? A madness most discreet,” and handed her the glass. Somewhere, a maraschino cherry gave notice that night.

Sunny was staunchly impractical as a proprietor as well. Rather than install an ice machine, a bar fixture as essential as a Solomon Burke record, he emptied and refilled standard ice cube trays all week long until, by Friday, enough had accumulated to supply his one night of business. He kept the ice in a cooler below the bar, groping around with his hands when a drink required rocks. Although the digital age had arrived in America some years ago, Sunny continued to play beaten-up cassettes on a monophonic stereo. When there weren’t fiddlers or accordionists communing in a booth, he would open a drawer and search through his modest selection: *The Songs of Audie Murphy*. Marilyn Monroe. Billie Holiday. Julie London. Nat King Cole. Jimmy Durante, on whom Sunny must have modeled himself during his formative years. He usually put on his most prized recording, Chet Baker’s *It Could Happen to You*, several times a night. No one seemed to mind. ■

Excerpted from the book Sunny’s Nights, by Tim Sultan (Random House, 2016). All rights reserved.

Bounty of the Promised Land

Philadelphia chef **MICHAEL SOLOMONOV** takes inspiration (and giddy delight) from the overflowing farm stands and veggie-focused cooking of his native Israel

BY PETER JON LINDBERG





Opposite: Tel Aviv's Gordon Beach, a surfing mecca. This page: Some of chef Michael Solomonov's many Israel-inspired vegetable dishes, including (clockwise from top left) twice-cooked eggplant with sherry vinegar and paprika, sautéed collard greens and caramelized onions, Moroccan carrots with Aleppo pepper and mint, and spicy roasted cauliflower with tahini. Recipes start on page 41.



M

ike Solomonov, sneakers caked in mud, hands stained red from plucking mulberries, comes bounding across the field like he's just picked the padlock on the candy shop. "Bro, check out these crazy squash!" He carries a long, pale green vegetable re-

sembling a peeled cucumber, albeit layered in downy peach-like fuzz. It's a *fakus*, he tells me, a curious plant native to this part of Israel. "You can cook it like zucchini, or eat it raw like cucumber," he says, breaking off a chunk and offering me a bite. It's snappy, slightly bitter, and entirely delicious. "Right?!" the chef replies with a grin, sprinting back to the patch to harvest some more.

We're at Mizpe Hayamim, a mountaintop farm and wellness retreat overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Most people visit Israel for the history, the monuments, but we're here to ogle and devour as much food as possible. To that end, all morning we've been prowling Mizpe Hayamim's fields in the summer heat: chomping into sun-warmed tomatoes, nibbling uprooted leeks, slicing tart green plums to sprinkle with fresh *za'atar*.

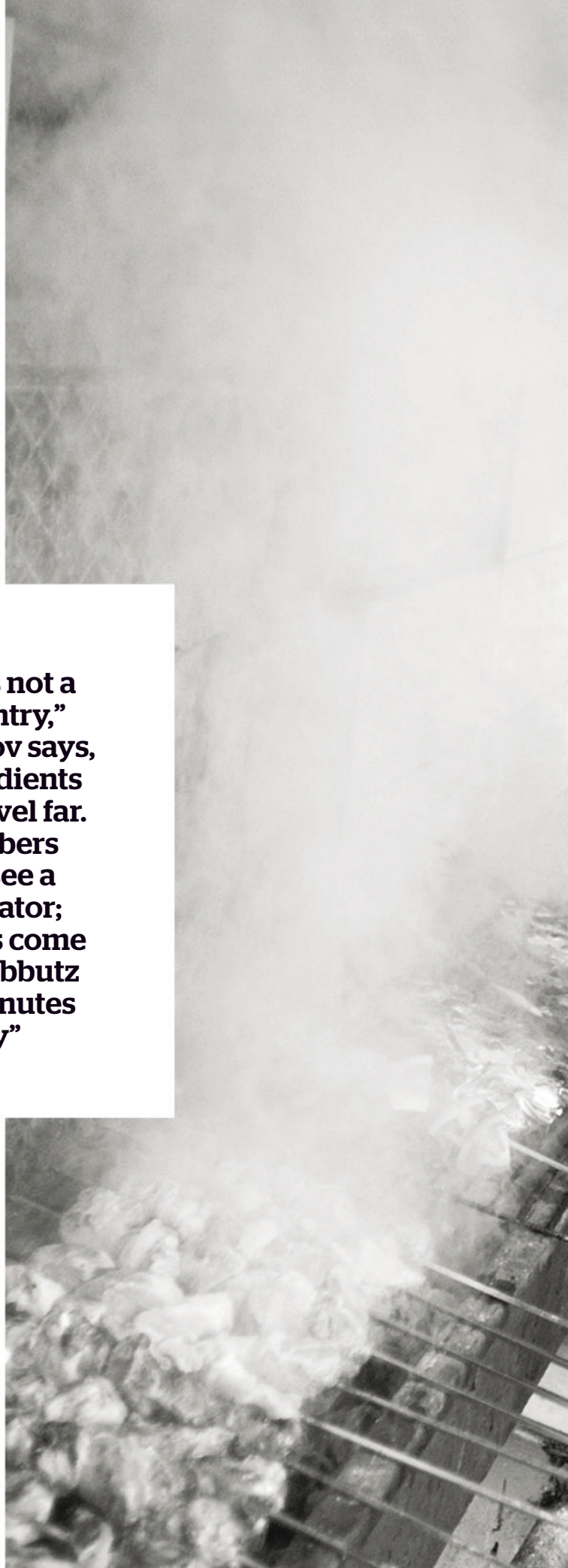
Every 38 seconds Solomonov leaps up to announce a thrilling find in the dirt—show him an obscure specimen of produce and he'll tell you its provenance, flavor profile, and ideal preparation. He waxes rhapsodic about the robustness of sautéed mallow, a.k.a. Egyptian spinach, or about the baby eggplants grown in Israel's north: "They're tiny, the size of Tic Tacs—unbelievably!" (Solomonov talks about vegetables like other Philadelphians talk about the Eagles.)

At the edge of the farm there's a rusted wire fence, and beyond that a hostile expanse of scrub and shale—a reminder that all this green bounty is the work of man. As emblems of Israeli agricultural ingenuity go, few can compare to this impossibly lush farm in the desert.

Solomonov was born just 80 miles from here, in the village of G'nei Yehudah, outside Tel Aviv. His family moved to Pennsylvania when he was 4, and though he's spent most of his life in the States, he feels utterly at home in this landscape: picking *za'atar* and eggplants and mulberries and *fakus*, conjuring some tasty way to turn them into dinner.

If you've been to Zahav, Solomonov's Israeli-inspired restaurant in Philadelphia, you'll know about his coffee-braised brisket, his grilled duck hearts, his smoked-and-braised lamb

"Israel is not a big country," Solomonov says, "so ingredients never travel far. Cucumbers never see a refrigerator; avocados come from a kibbutz that's minutes away"





Michael Solomonov
inspects the grilled kebabs.
He serves his own
beef version with pickled
persimmons (see
page 42 for recipe).

shoulder with pomegranate and Persian rice. But mostly you'll remember what might elsewhere be considered mere accompaniments: the Moroccan spiced carrots, the beets with tehina, the twice-cooked eggplant, the *pitryot* hummus scattered with hen of the woods mushrooms, the fried cauliflower ... good Lord, the fried cauliflower. That the cauliflower rivals the lamb as his signature dish is testament to the chef's genius with vegetables, which become in his hands as id-fully craveable as any slow-cooked, fat-laced protein.

"In Israel, vegetables are not an afterthought," Solomonov writes in his new cookbook, *Zahav: A World of Israeli Cooking*. "In Israel, vegetables are the whole thing." Last summer I joined the chef on a return trip to the homeland, to learn firsthand how that whole thing played out.

To visit Israel with Solomonov is to eat lustily, impulsively, and nonstop, bouncing from one *hummusiya* or *laffa* cart to the next. The chef has the build, demeanor, and close-cropped hair of an athlete, and the energy of a jackrabbit. He's up at sunrise to surf the breaks off Tel Aviv's Gordon Beach. Afterward it's a sprawling Israeli breakfast spread at our hotel—and then we're off on a manic, multi-culti food crawl as we tag all the dishes on Solomonov's must-eat list.

"There are no 'Israeli' restaurants in Israel," he says. "Instead you have Bulgarian, Iraqi, Czech, Turkish, Romanian, Tunisian, and a few dozen other cuisines all happening in this one tiny country."

This becomes clear on our first night in Tel Aviv, when we meet friends at a 1950s-era Yemenite *shipudiya* (grill house) called Busi, a longtime favorite of Solomonov's. "These guys do *amazing* cow udders," he assures us as we take our seats at a long booth. Within minutes, servers have set down dozens of small plates, lined up end to end—a runaway train of *salatim* spanning the length of the table.

"They call this place a Yemenite grill, but the food is from all over," he says, pointing his way around the *salatim* spread. "These are Moroccan"—a carrot salad with Aleppo pepper and cumin—"this is Russian"—a mayonnaise-y pea-and-potato dish—"this is North African"—tomato-and-pepper stew. "The coleslaw is Polish, the baba ghanounj is Turkish or Greek, the pickled cabbage is German, and that pepper salad, I don't know where that's from but it's stupid-good."

Starting a meal with a round of *salatim* or salads—traditionally a Palestinian thing—is now a given at most restaurants here. And this is no throwaway filler to tide us over, but a meal's worth of flavors in itself, Israel on a single overcrowded table. All those tastes somehow fit together, with one dish coaxing out latent notes in the next. Solomonov begins dinners at Zahav the same way, with a cluster of starters

The *salatim* are no throwaway filler. They are a meal's worth of flavors in themselves, Israel on a single overcrowded table

that feel like the main event. At Busi, as at Zahav, one could leave after the *salatim* and feel entirely satisfied.

Fortunately, we don't leave—and now come the meats and offal, straight off the grill. Cow udders are no longer on the menu, their kosher status having recently been questioned by rabbinical authorities. (Only Solomonov seems disappointed by this.) But there is fabulous grilled onget; flame-licked sweetbreads; grilled foie gras dangling off the skewer like molten marshmallows; and, best of all, crunchily-tender umami-bombs that I presume are

chicken kidneys until he corrects me: They're turkey testicles, and they're gone in seconds.

After dinner there will be more stops for snacks—including the phenomenal roasted cauliflower at Miznon—followed by a midnight round at Ramleh, a jam-packed drinking den off Rothschild Boulevard. Behind the bar, the staff is mixing cocktails while grilling molasses-topped apricots over charcoal. (Does your local do that?) Everyone is dancing madly and urgently singing along. "Israelis throw down like nobody else," Solomonov shouts over the roar. "You get to a party at seven and some girl's already drinking vodka from a ram's horn."

Before he got famous for hummus and fried cauliflower, Solomonov held the food of his homeland at arm's length, at least professionally. In today's post-Ottolenghi era, it's easy to forget when Israeli cuisine was not taken seriously by the chef-world elite, or even by its own practitioners. "In America, 'Israeli restaurant' meant divey places serving crappy shawarma or falafel," Solomonov recalls. "They were owned by Israeli businessmen who were neither chefs nor grandmothers, so the food sucked."

That low standard, he says, informed a certain bias against Middle Eastern flavors, which chefs and diners alike saw as both too simple and too exotic, at once over-familiar (falafel, pita bread) and confoundingly strange (preserved lemon, chicken hearts). "When I started out in restaurant kitchens, I didn't think hummus or a chopped salad could ever be cool," he says.

Zahav was an outlier when it opened in 2008—a high-end Israeli restaurant in Old City Philadelphia—but became an unlikely hit, earning Solomonov a James Beard Award. Embracing the dishes he craved at home (and on his return visits to Israel), the chef came to realize that "those simple, elemental foods and flavors are what we all want, if done right."

Take, not least, that hummus. So beloved is Zahav's rendition that in 2014 the chef opened a spin-off, Dizengoff—named for one of Tel Aviv's main boulevards—dedicated wholly to hummus. (He plans to open a second location, in New York, later this year.) As Solomonov notes in his cookbook, the hummus has just five main ingredients, "but it took us longer to develop than any other recipe." The key, he says, is "an obscene amount" of tehina, made daily with



Fried Potatoes with Kashkaval Cheese

Serves 4 to 6

Active: 35 min.; Total: 1 hr. 45 min.

Piquant kashkaval, a Balkan cows' or sheep's milk cheese, and mildly spicy shifka peppers, native to Israel, add sharpness to the fried potatoes. If you can't find shifkas, jarred pepperoncini work just as well.

- 2 1/4 lbs. baby purple and gold potatoes
- 2 Tbsp. kosher salt, plus more
- Vegetable oil, for frying
- 1/4 cup (about 1 oz.) finely grated kashkaval cheese
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup thinly sliced shifka peppers or jarred pepperoncini
- 4 anchovies in oil, drained and minced
- 1 cup loosely packed arugula
- Freshly ground black pepper

1 In a 6-qt. saucepan, combine the potatoes with the 2 tablespoons salt and 2 quarts water. Bring to a boil and cook until the

potatoes are just tender, about 12 minutes. Drain the potatoes and transfer to a cutting board. Gently press each potato to flatten slightly, while keeping each potato whole.

2 In the 6-qt. saucepan, pour enough vegetable oil to come 2 inches up the side. Gently place the potatoes into the cold oil, bring to a boil over medium heat, and cook until they turn dark golden brown and are crisp, about 1 hour to 1 hour 10 minutes.

3 While the potatoes are frying, make the dressing: In a large bowl, stir the cheese, olive oil, peppers, and anchovies together until evenly combined. Use a slotted spoon to drain the potatoes from the oil and transfer to the bowl with the dressing along with the arugula. Quickly toss the potatoes to coat with the dressing, season with salt and pepper, and serve immediately.

Fried potatoes with kashkaval cheese (left) and cucumber, pear, and sumac-onion salad (see page 42 for recipe).



Chewy cashew baklava (see page 45 for recipe) and beachgoers in Tel Aviv (right).



Cucumber, Pear, and Sumac-Onion Salad

Serves 4 to 6; 📖 Page 41
Total: 35 min.

This twist on a classic Israeli salad, in which Asian pear stands in for tomatoes, is a refreshing counterpart to the warm, spicy chicken (see page 46 for recipe) that Michael Solomonov serves it with. Sumac-flavored onions add tang to balance the sweet fruit. If you like, you can also substitute 2 mangoes, peeled, pitted, and cut into 1/4-inch cubes, for the Asian pears.

- 1/2 medium red onion, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 1/4 tsp. kosher salt, plus more
- 1/4 tsp. ground sumac
- 2 Asian pears (about 1 1/2 lbs.), peeled, quartered, cored, and cut into 1/4-inch cubes
- 1 large cucumber (about 12 oz.), trimmed and cut into 1/4-inch cubes
- 3 Tbsp. roughly chopped mint
- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice

In a small bowl, toss the onion with the vinegar, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and sumac and let stand for 15 minutes. In a medium bowl, combine the Asian pears and cucumber with the remaining 1 teaspoon salt, the mint, olive oil, and lemon juice. Add half the onion to the salad and stir to combine. Spoon the salad into a serving bowl and garnish with the remaining onion.

Grilled Beef Kebabs with Pickled Persimmons

Serves 4 to 6; not pictured
Active: 45 min.; Total: 2 days

Minimally spiced Romanian beef kebabs are grilled until lightly charred and served with intense, bright pickled persimmons in Michael Solomonov's take on Israeli street food. The persimmons are imbued with heady spices like dried lime, cardamom, and coriander, which play off their floral sweetness. Use the squat, tomato-like Fuyu persimmons or, Solomonov's favorite, Sharon fruits, an Israeli-developed hybrid closely related to the Fuyu.

For the pickled persimmons:

- 1 3/4 cups white wine vinegar
- 2 Tbsp. sugar
- 1 Tbsp. whole black peppercorns
- 1 1/2 tsp. whole coriander seeds
- 1 1/2 tsp. yellow mustard seeds
- 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 5 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
- 3 green cardamom pods, crushed
- 1 dried lime, crushed (kalustyans.com)
- 1 lb. Fuyu persimmons or Sharon fruits, cored, peeled, and cut into eight wedges each

For the kebabs:

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1/4 cup minced flat-leaf parsley
- 3 Tbsp. club soda
- 2 Tbsp. grated yellow onion

- 1/2 tsp. sugar
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- Kosher salt

1 In a medium saucepan, combine the vinegar with the sugar, peppercorns, coriander seeds, mustard seeds, cinnamon, salt, garlic, cardamom, lime, and 1 cup water, and bring to a boil. Arrange the persimmons in a shallow dish and pour the brine and spices over them. Cover the dish with plastic wrap and let cool to room temperature. Transfer the dish to the refrigerator and chill for at least 2 days or up to 2 weeks.

2 In a large bowl, combine the beef with the parsley, club soda, onion, sugar, and garlic. Season with salt and, with your hands, mix until evenly combined. Form the beef into twelve 2-inch, 1 1/2-oz. balls and then form 3 balls each into football-shaped ovals onto 4 flat metal skewers. Place the skewers on a baking sheet and refrigerate for 1 hour.

3 Light a grill or heat the broiler. Remove the skewers from the refrigerator and grill, turning once, until lightly charred and cooked through, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove the skewers from the grill and serve while hot with the pickled persimmons.

Slow-Roasted Sweet Potatoes with Garlic Labneh

Serves 4 to 6; 📖 Page 44
Active: 15 min.; Total: 3 hr.

Inspired by the yams he ate at Miznon restaurant in Tel Aviv, Michael Solomonov

organic sesame seeds, lemon, and garlic, which results in a far lighter and nuttier hummus. (Another rule: Hummus never spends a second in the fridge.) Simple as it is, the dish can also be dressed up—ladled with stewed favas (*ful*), with spicy ground beef and pine nuts (Jerusalem-style), or, in the classic *masabacha* preparation, with warmed chickpeas and a generous drizzle of olive oil.

One of the best *masabacha* hummus preparations I've tasted (with Zahav's running a very close second) is served at Shlomo & Doron, an indoor-outdoor, communal-seating *hummusiya* in Tel Aviv's Yemenite Quarter, down a narrow lane from the Carmel Market. Purportedly founded in 1937, it also offers what the menu calls a "complete" hummus: piled with *ful* and simmered chickpeas, minced garlic, *schug* (a cilantro-spiked Yemenite hot sauce), fresh parsley, and—because you need it—a boiled egg. The absurdly rich assemblage of textures and temperatures recalls an '80s-era nine-layer dip; you scoop it up with fluffy, piping-hot pita or (better yet) wedges of raw, sweet, fiery white onion. Every ingredient blasts through with piercing freshness and intensity, which, as Solomonov points out, is what distinguishes dishes in Israel from the same ones back in the States.

"Israel is basically an island," he says as we browse the produce bins in the Carmel Market, admiring the plump dates, neon-green kiwis, and countless varieties of eggplant. "Everything comes from here, and it's not a big country, so it never travels far. You're eating cucumbers that have never seen a fridge or the back of a truck, at least not for long. And avocados from a kibbutz that's minutes away."

He tells me about the tomatoes grown in the Negev desert. "Like everywhere, they're running low on water, so they built this giant aquifer, which they use to grow tomatoes, melons, olives, all this stuff. But the water is brackish, and that salt translates into added sugar in the fruit. The tomatoes are so sweet they taste like Coca-Cola."

Good tomatoes, of course, are available year-round in Israel. But Solomonov cooks in Pennsylvania, where for a third of the year hardly anything grows above ground. How do you bring the fertile Middle East to the frozen Mid-Atlantic? For the chef, it's about substitutions. Consider, for instance, the Israeli salad (which Israelis actually refer to as a chopped or Arabic salad)—diced tomatoes, cucumbers, and onion dressed with olive oil and parsley. "There's no meal where Israeli salad would be out of place," Solomonov says. During visits to the homeland he'll eat it three times a day. But during frigid Pennsylvania win-

ters, he'll swap in mangoes, grapes, Asian pears, or pickled persimmons for the tomatoes. It's hardly locavore, but it is seasonal, and it's fantastic. "The point is not to get hung up on specific ingredients," he says, "and just respect that balance of sweetness and acidity and textures."

Fried eggplant, man—it's like good French toast, sweet and savory and totally delicious," Solomonov says en route to our final meal in Tel Aviv. This is a man who can do more with eggplant than most chefs can do with a chicken. At Zahav, he'll sear thick meaty rounds until nearly blackened, then top them with tehina, carob molasses, pistachios, and pomegranate seeds. He'll grill one whole until it collapses into a creamy pudding, then dress it with herbed labneh, grilled tomatoes, and pea shoots. Or—in his favorite method—he'll roast it directly on the coals, turning the skin to charred parchment and perfuming the flesh with sweet smoke. (He always brines eggplant before grilling, to mitigate the bitterness.)

But it's *sabich*, the fried-eggplant sandwich introduced to Israel by Iraqi Jews, that Solomonov hungers for as soon as he lands in Tel Aviv. Traditionally eaten on Saturday mornings, it happens to be a knockout remedy for hangovers and long-haul flights.

So here we are in nearby Givatayim, on a side street lined with fiery orange poinciana trees, and although it's barely 11 a.m., the line is out the door at Oved's Sabich. As we wait, three pony-tailed women—IDF camouflage, machine guns slung over their shoulders—stand at a Formica countertop, inhaling their sandwiches in a minute flat.

Finally we reach the front, order two for ourselves, and watch the line cook set to work. It starts with thin coins of eggplant that are brined, fried low-and-slow in canola oil, and left to cool; their appearance and mouth-feel recall Caribbean fried plantains. Into a fluffy pita they go, then on goes tehina and hummus, a spoonful of *amba* (a pickled-mango condiment), jalapeños, crisp cucumbers and diced tomato, and an egg that's been boiled with coffee grounds and onion skins till the whites turn beige.

Like nearly everything we've tasted in Israel, each bite is both intensely familiar and entirely novel. It is, indeed, a supremely well-conceived sandwich.

"It's freaking dope, dude, is what it is!" Solomonov laughs, wiping a smear of tehina from his chin before devouring the rest. ■

Where to Eat

.....

Mizpe Hayamim

This wellness retreat includes a large organic farm that supplies produce and dairy to its two restaurants. *Off road 8900 toward Safed, Rosh Pina; mizpe-hayamim.com*

Busi

Moroccan carrot salad, baba ghannouj, and North African tomato-and-pepper stew are all part of the *salatim* spread at this 1950s-style grill house. *41 Etzel St., Tel Aviv*

Miznon

Cap off a late night out at this snack shop serving Israeli street food favorites. *21 Ibn Gabirol, Tel Aviv, and King George St. 30, Tel Aviv; miznon.com*

Shlomo & Doron

Diners sit shoulder-to-shoulder and use raw onion and warm pita to scoop fresh *masabacha* hummus at this café near the Carmel Market. *29 Yishkon St., Tel Aviv; facebook.com/shlomodoronhummus*

Ramleh

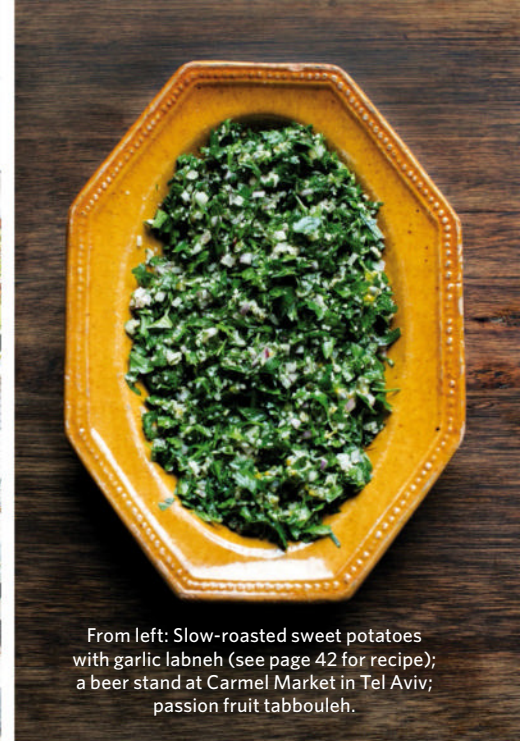
Sing and swig vodka alongside dancing Israelis at this popular watering hole, then refuel with grilled sweet apricots served at the bar. *97 Allenby St., Tel Aviv*

Carmel Market

Israel's diversity is on display at this huge emporium: Kiwis, dates, eggplants, pine-apples, cukes, and avocados all come from within an hour's drive. *Allenby, King George, and Sheinkin streets, Tel Aviv; shuktlv.co.il*

Oved's Sabich

Unusual sandwiches, like the eggplant pita topped with coffee-and-onion-boiled eggs, are the perfect antidote to a Friday night out. *7 Sirkin St., Givatayim*



From left: Slow-roasted sweet potatoes with garlic labneh (see page 42 for recipe); a beer stand at Carmel Market in Tel Aviv; passion fruit tabbouleh.

developed this recipe for sweet potatoes, rubbed with lots of salt and dill seed, slowly roasted until soft, and topped with a sharp, garlicky labneh to cut the potatoes' sweetness. Resist the urge to raise the heat and roast the sweet potatoes faster; their slow bake renders them incredibly sweet and tender, the hallmark of this simple dish.

- 4 medium sweet potatoes (about 3 lbs.), scrubbed clean**
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil**
- 2 tsp. kosher salt, plus more**
- 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ tsp. dill seeds**
- 1 garlic clove, peeled**
- ½ cup labneh**
- Chives, cut into 1-inch batons, to garnish**

1 Heat the oven to 275°. In a large bowl, rub the sweet potatoes with the olive oil, 2 teaspoons salt, the pepper, and dill seeds until evenly coated. Arrange the sweet potatoes on a foil-lined baking sheet and bake until very soft inside and caramelized on the bottom, about 2½ hours. Heat the broiler and broil the sweet potatoes until lightly charred on the top, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove the sweet potatoes from the broiler and let cool for 10 minutes on the baking sheet.

2 Meanwhile, using a Microplane grater, grate the garlic into a small bowl, stir in the labneh, and season with salt. Transfer the sweet potatoes to a serving platter, gently crush with your hand to expose the potato's flesh, and season the flesh with salt. Dollop each potato with some of the labneh and sprinkle with chives before serving.

Spicy Roasted Cauliflower with Tahini

Serves 4 to 6; 📷 Page 37
Active: 15 min.; Total: 1 hr.

Whole cauliflower is quartered and roasted with paprika, turmeric, and jalapeño in this dish from Miznon restaurant in Tel Aviv. Michael Solomonov drizzles the crispy roasted cauliflower with raw tahini as a creamy dressing to balance the fiery chiles.

- 1 head of cauliflower (about 2¼ lbs.), leaves intact**
- ½ cup olive oil**
- 2 Tbsp. kosher salt**
- 1 tsp. ground turmeric**
- 1 tsp. sweet paprika**
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced**
- 1 jalapeño, stemmed, halved, seeded, and thinly sliced crosswise**
- 1 lemon, halved**
- ½ cup tahini**
- Cilantro leaves, to garnish**

1 Heat the oven to 400°. On a cutting board, quarter the cauliflower, leaving the core and leaves intact. Transfer the quarters to a large bowl and rub with the olive oil, salt, turmeric, paprika, garlic, and jalapeño. Arrange the cauliflower on a foil-lined baking sheet and roast until tender at the core and lightly browned on the outside, about 45 minutes. Heat the broiler and broil the cauliflower until lightly charred on the top, 1 to 2 minutes.

2 Remove the cauliflower from the broiler and transfer to a serving dish. Squeeze the

lemon halves over the cauliflower, covering them in the juice, and drizzle with the tahini. Garnish the cauliflower with cilantro and serve while hot.

Passion Fruit Tabbouleh

Serves 4 to 6
Active: 15 min.; Total: 2 hr.

In the wintertime, Michael Solomonov eschews tomatoes in his tabbouleh and utilizes in-season passion fruit to add tang and brightness. Despite what you might think, when you're picking a passion fruit, the wrinklier the outside, the better, as wrinkly fruits are more ripe and thus have a more pronounced floral flavor than those with smooth skins.

- ½ cup fine bulgur wheat**
- ¼ cup olive oil**
- 1 tsp. kosher salt**
- 5 passion fruits**
- 2 cups finely chopped flat-leaf parsley**
- ¼ cup finely chopped red onion**
- Freshly ground black pepper**

1 In a medium bowl, stir the wheat with the olive oil, salt, and ¾ cup boiling water. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the wheat stand until tender and the water is absorbed, about 35 minutes.

2 Uncover the wheat and stir with a fork to fluff. Cut 4 of the passion fruits in half, scoop out their pulp and seeds into the wheat, and add the parsley and red onion. Stir to combine and scrape the tabbouleh into a serving bowl and let stand for 1 hour. Scoop out the remaining passion fruit's

pulp and seeds and drizzle them over the tabbouleh before serving.

Moroccan Carrots with Aleppo Pepper and Mint

Serves 4 to 6; 📖 Page 37

Active: 30 min.; Total: 2 hr. 30 min.

Fresh mint, Aleppo pepper, and cumin flavor this humble carrot salad, sweetened lightly by a dressing made with the carrots' cooking liquid, which becomes a concentrated syrup when reduced.

- 1½ lbs. small Thumbelina carrots, or large carrots cut crosswise into 1½-inch lengths
- 1 tsp. kosher salt, plus more
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 2 Tbsp. roughly chopped mint
- 1 tsp. Aleppo pepper
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. sugar

1 Place the carrots in a 10-inch, deep-sided skillet and pour in 1½ cups water. Season the carrots liberally with salt and bring to a boil. Cook the carrots, turning as needed, until they just begin to soften, 8 to 10 minutes. Using tongs, transfer the carrots to a cutting board and let cool. Halve the Thumbelina carrots (if using the large carrot pieces, cut them in half lengthwise and then crosswise into ¼-inch-thick half-moons).

2 Return the skillet to the heat, add the garlic to the cooking liquid, and boil until the liquid reduces to about 3 Tbsp. and is syrupy, about 3 minutes. Remove the skillet from the heat and whisk in the 1 teaspoon of salt along with the olive oil, lemon juice, mint, Aleppo, cumin, and sugar. Pour the dressing into a large bowl and stir in the carrots to evenly coat in the dressing. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate the carrots for at least 2 hours before serving.

Twice-Cooked Eggplant with Sherry Vinegar and Paprika

Serves 4 to 6; 📖 Page 37

Total: 2 hr. 40 min.

In this preparation, eggplant is charred until almost burnt, which gives it chocolate-like notes, and then cooked and mashed with aromatics and sherry vinegar to give it a pronounced sour flavor.

This salad can be served on its own, as a side to roast lamb, or, better yet, as a spread on sandwiches.

- 2 medium eggplants (about 2½ lbs.), trimmed and cut crosswise into ½-inch rounds
- 2 Tbsp. kosher salt
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 cup finely chopped red bell pepper
- ¼ cup sherry vinegar
- 1 tsp. sweet paprika
- ½ cup roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 1 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice

1 Arrange the eggplant slices in a single layer on a wire rack set over paper towels and sprinkle evenly on both sides with the salt. Let the eggplant stand for 30 minutes to drain, and then wipe dry with paper towels.

2 In a large nonstick skillet, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium-high. Working in 6 batches, add the eggplant slices to fit in a single layer and cook until almost blackened, about 10 minutes. Flip the slices and cook until the other side is blackened, about 8 minutes more. Transfer the eggplant slices to a plate and then drain the oil and wipe the skillet clean.

3 Return the skillet to medium heat and add the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil. Add the bell pepper and cook, stirring, until the peppers are soft and lightly caramelized, about 12 minutes. Return all the eggplant to the skillet along with the vinegar and paprika and cook, lightly mashing the eggplant as you go, until the vinegar evaporates, about 8 minutes. Remove the skillet from the heat, stir in the parsley and lemon juice, and scrape the eggplant into a serving bowl. Serve the eggplant warm or at room temperature.

Sautéed Collard Greens with Six-Hour Caramelized Onions

Serves 4 to 6; 📖 Page 37

Total: 40 min.

Rich, sweet caramelized onions (see recipe below) are swirled into these sautéed chopped collard greens, giving them a deep, umami-like bittersweet flavor in this simple side dish.

- ½ cup olive oil
- 8 cups finely chopped collard greens (about 2½ lbs.)
- 1½ cups Six-Hour Caramelized Onions (see recipe below)

- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- 2 tsp. ground fenugreek
- 2 tsp. kosher salt

In a large saucepan, heat the olive oil over medium-low. Add the collard greens and cook, stirring occasionally, until the collards are wilted, about 25 minutes. Stir in the caramelized onions, vinegar, fenugreek, and salt and cook to blend flavors, about 5 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat, scrape the collards into a bowl, and serve while hot.

Six-Hour Caramelized Onions

Chef Solomonov's caramelized onions are an essential part of his cooking. He takes copious amounts of onions and cooks them low-and-slow for hours until they're uniformly dark brown and have the consistency of soft butter. Make a large batch and store them in the refrigerator for up to a month to use as a garnish or with salads, with roast chicken, or on toast with ricotta. To make them: In a very large Dutch oven, heat ½ cup olive oil over low. Add 6 lbs. (about 12 large) thinly sliced yellow onions, season liberally with kosher salt, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are darkly caramelized and spreadably soft, about 5½ to 6 hours. Scrape the onions in a bowl and let cool. Makes 2½ cups.

Cashew Baklava

Serves 4 to 6; 📖 Page 42

Active: 35 min.; Total: 2 hr. 15 min.

Instead of making large trays of layered baklava squares, Solomonov rolls a filling of cashews (his favorite nut) and brown sugar in phyllo into long, smooth cigars, the perfect snack-size sweets.

- 1 stick plus 6 Tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup (6 oz.) cashews
- 6 Tbsp. packed light brown sugar
- ½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ cup (3½ oz.) granulated sugar
- Finely grated zest of ½ lemon
- 2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 3 phyllo sheets (16-by-13-inch)

1 Heat the oven to 350°. In a food processor, combine 6 tablespoons butter with the cashews, brown sugar, cinnamon, and salt and pulse until the filling is finely chopped.

2 In a small saucepan, combine the granulated sugar with ¼ cup water. Bring to a boil and cook, stirring, until the sugar dissolves, about 2 minutes. Remove the syrup from the heat, stir in the lemon

zest and juice, and let stand for 15 minutes. Pour the lemon syrup through a fine sieve into a glass measuring cup and let cool; discard the zest.

3 Grease an 8-inch square metal baking pan with some of the remaining melted butter. On a work surface, lay 1 sheet of phyllo dough so the short sides are parallel to you. Brush the sheet with some butter and place the second sheet over the first. Brush the phyllo with

butter and cover with the third sheet. Brush the last phyllo sheet with butter, cut the phyllo stack in half lengthwise, and then cut each rectangle crosswise into 5 equal small rectangles. Arrange 2 tablespoons of the cashew filling in a line along the long edge of 1 of the phyllo rectangles. Roll the phyllo around the filling into a log and place the log in the prepared baking pan. Repeat with the remaining filling and phyllo rectangles to make 9 more logs, arranging each log

against the others so they fit snugly in a single layer in the pan.

4 Brush the remaining melted butter over the top of the logs and bake until light brown and crisp, about 35 minutes. Remove the baking pan from the oven, pour the cooled syrup over the baklava logs, and let cool to room temperature. Invert each log and let stand for 15 minutes to allow the syrup to redistribute itself in the logs before serving.



Solomonov
choosing from the
delectable array at
Tavlin Market
outside Jerusalem.





Roasted Chicken with Harissa

Serves 4 to 6

Active: 20 min.; Total: 5 hr.

Harissa, the ubiquitous North African pepper paste, flavors this juicy roast chicken from chef Michael Solomonov, who makes his with ground Aleppo pepper instead of fresh or dried chiles. Solomonov pairs the chicken with his version of Israeli cucumber salad (see page 42 for recipe).

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Aleppo pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vegetable oil
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. ground caraway
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. ground coriander
- 1 garlic clove, peeled
- 1 Tbsp. kosher salt, plus more
- One $3\frac{1}{2}$ -to-4-lb. whole chicken
- 1 Tbsp. celery seeds

1 In a blender or small food processor, combine the Aleppo with the oil, vinegar, cumin, caraway, coriander, and garlic. Season with salt and purée until smooth. Scrape the harissa into a bowl and set aside 2 tablespoons; reserve the remaining for another use.

2 Using kitchen shears, cut along each side of the chicken's back-bone and remove it. Turn the chicken breast-side-up and press to flatten the chicken. Transfer the chicken, skin side up, to a wire rack set inside a rimmed baking sheet and rub the chicken all over with the harissa, the 1 tablespoon salt, and the celery seeds. Cover the chicken with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight.

3 Heat the oven to 425°. Roast the chicken until golden brown, about 35 minutes, then let stand 15 minutes before serving.

The Forgotten Hat of God...

...is a pretty great nickname for the mountainous Hungarian wine region that's about to get the recognition it deserves.



ADAM LEITH GOLLNER explores the quirky mists of volcanic Somló and the equally wondrous Tokaj to discover the 500-year-old wines being made new again • Photographs by Jason Lowe



In Somló, a misty wine region in northwestern Hungary, vineyards stretch up and down the slopes of a dormant volcano, making the soil richly mineral. Local winemaker Béla Fekete (left) is famous for his smoky whites.

There are 27 villages in the foothills of Tokaj— all of them buried in fog.

Everything is gray-white gauze: the timeless raisins on their vines, the medieval castles, the volcanic Zemplén Mountains themselves. The hazy Turkish-bath vibe is a result of airborne moisture from the Bodrog and the Tisza rivers—but there’s a primordial, ancient-in-every-way quality to life here on the far side of the Danube, where feeling stuck in the mists of time is a daily occurrence.

Getting around by car can be difficult, which is why you still see horses and buggies navigating these backcountry roads. Fortunately, Judit Bodó, the 38-year-old winemaker at Bott Pince winery, has come to pick me up at my inn.

“It’ll be better this way,” she counsels, knowing that I’d get lost in the impenetrable brume thickets trying to find the cellar. As we drive along the main road in the village of Tokaj (pronounced TOKE-eye), located in the center of this region in northern Hungary, Bodó slows down to avoid some ghostly figures that appear in the gloom. It’s a group of kids doing BMX tricks in the middle of the street. They wave at Bodó through the condensation.

“There’s the *banda*,” she says, using the Hungarian word for a band of friends. “They’re always here, riding around in the traffic. It’s dangerous, so I’m going to hold an auction where we winemakers will sell old bottles of wine for a lot of money and donate the proceeds to build a bike park.”

The kids are wearing headbands and punk rock T-shirts and skateboard shoes and they make me think of the teen-aged *banda* I belonged to when my family lived in Budapest in the early 1990s. My friends and I would spend all our time hanging out in the local schoolyard, playing soccer, making out, listening to the Ramones on boom boxes, and—because there was no enforced legal drinking age in Hungary then—getting wasted on Hungarian furmint, the name for a local grape variety and one of Hungary’s most distinctive white wines.

At that time, my father grew grapes on the slopes of Mount Szent-György overlooking Lake Balaton, an hour and a half southwest of Budapest. Each year, the *szüret*, or grape harvest, was an occasion for family and friends to get together, drink first-run juice, and eat paprika-laced beef stew cooked in a cauldron over an open fire. We would pick the fruit by hand, filling our baskets with gray-

green bounty, and then toss it all into a Kremlin-era grape crusher. My dad’s wine, a thin white olasz riesling, wasn’t sold commercially. Other than sweet Tokaji—the name for the wines from the region—and a few other mass-market bottlings (Bull’s Blood of Eger, anyone?), it seemed inconceivable that Hungarian wines would ever find an international market. It was a shame, as their minerally dry whites deserved a wider audience than us bored teenagers.

Things have come a long way since then. Having dinner not long ago at Roberta’s, that haute-hipster pizzeria in Brooklyn, I noticed something astonishing: There were not one, but *five* Hungarian wines on its wine list, including a few of those volcanic whites. The sommelier suggested I try Béla Fekete’s white juhfark, from Somló. It was incredible: smoky and rich, yet full of a profound minerality, like an aged santorini, or a premier cru chablis, but with a taste bud—singeing Central European spiciness all its own.

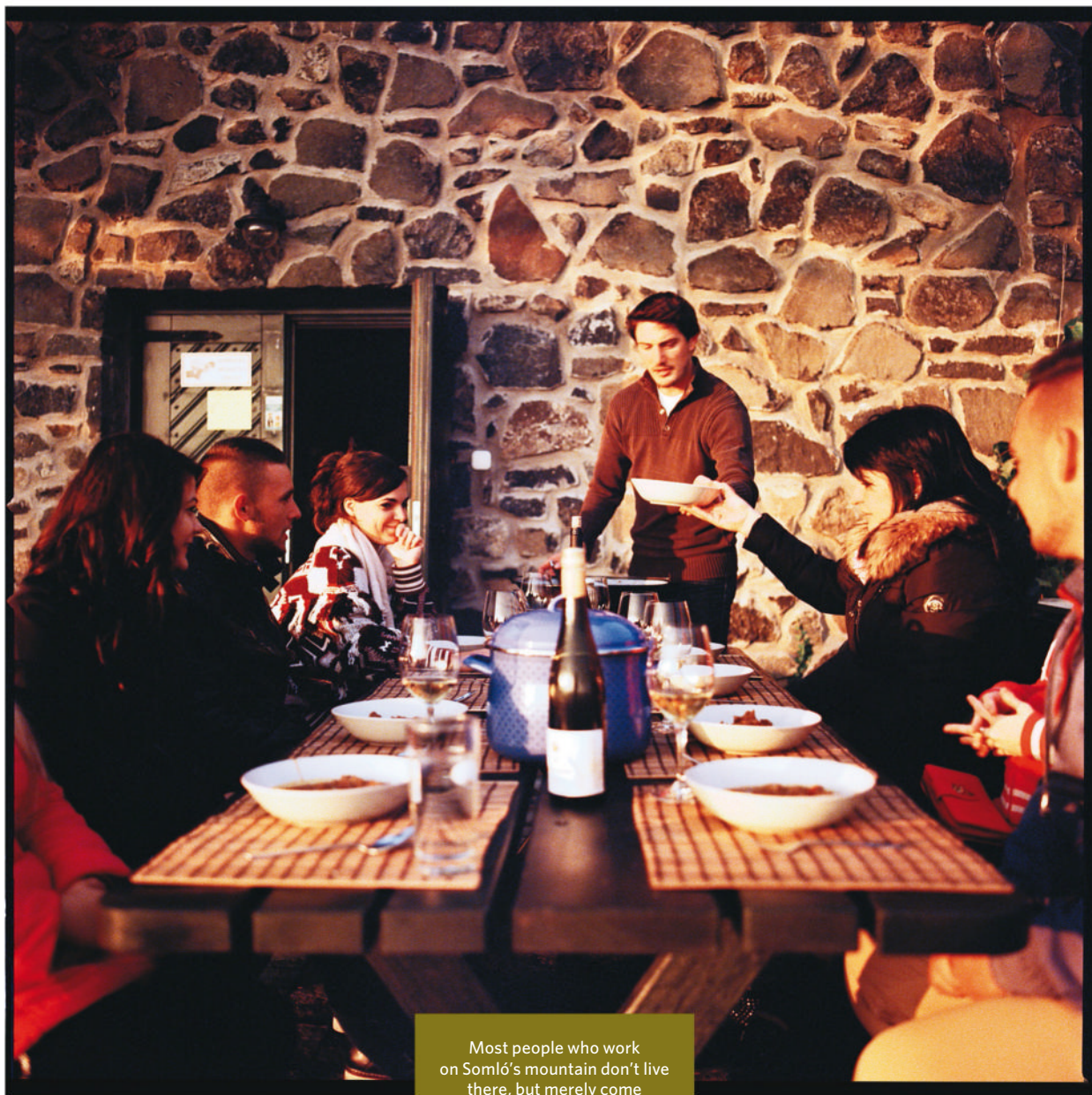
Whether Hungary will ever again regain the stature it enjoyed from the 17th century to the 19th century—when it produced the best-regarded and most expensive wines in Europe—remains to be seen. What’s clear, as I learned when I visited the country’s two esteemed wine-producing regions, Somló (located 30 miles north of my father’s vineyard) and Tokaj (about three hours from Budapest in the polar opposite direction), is that the quality of Hungarian dry white wines—scintillatingly mineral, brightly textured, of an otherworldly complexity—has never been higher. Word isn’t fully out about these volcanic wines yet, which means they are still available at a discount. Many talented young growers are learning from legends like Fekete how best to capture their regions’ singular attributes, which bodes well for the future.

The label on the back of Fekete’s juhfark, the one that spurred this Hungarian adventure, recommends that his wine be “ideally enjoyed with wild fowl by candlelight.”

“Wild pheasant works especially well with our wines,” affirms Fekete, when I meet him at his modest home on the outskirts of Veszprém in Somló. “And candles? Well,



Over cauldrons of a hearty beef and paprika stew (bottom left), winemakers (and their canine friends) in Somló routinely gather to drink wine al fresco (top left). A half-day's drive east, in Tokaj, the vineyards (top right) of István Szepsy and Samuel Tinon (bottom right) consistently produce astonishingly complex wines.



Most people who work on Somló's mountain don't live there, but merely come for the day. On the terrace of the Somló Wine Shop, a tight-knit band of "true" Somló residents and winemakers frequently gathers to dine and drink.

they just make everything seem more romantic." He speaks about romance and wild game with the kind of authority that only an 89-year-old winemaker known as "The Grand Old Man of Somló" who often rocks thick-lensed, government-issued, Run DMC-style Eastern bloc glasses can command.

Fekete makes several different wines, all white, all grown on the volcanic hill of Somló, and all of which have an affinity for game birds and candelabras. They also match splendidly with pretzel sticks, as I learn when Fekete's wife, Bori, puts some out for us to snack on.

"The truth is, dry white Somló wine is good with everything," she notes, pouring us another glass of their golden wine. "Wild meats, especially, but anything savory, really. Try it with different things—you'll see."

Somló was formed millions of years ago from the lava-encrusted remains of a volcanic eruption. Whereas the Tokaj region consists of a number of volcanic mountains, the hill

of Somló rises unexpectedly out of the flat surrounding plains like an immense pith helmet (hence its local name: "The Forgotten Hat of God"). The wines grown on these igneous slopes are renowned for taking

on the soil's smoky characteristics and are traditionally described as "fiery"—filled with a magma-like intensity.

On the evening I arrive in Somló, I attend a party in the vines on the hillside where a large black cauldron hangs over burning logs, just as I remembered from my childhood. It is filled with that same comforting meat stew. With the scent of paprika in the air, a group of thirty-something winemakers has gathered to share their wines with one another. These are exclusively white wines—some more polished than others, some more light-bodied or fruit-forward, but all sharing that mineral flavor.

When the winemakers at the gathering find out I'm here to learn more about the terroir, I'm whisked to the Somló Wine Shop, a cellar that serves as a tasting room and bar.

We sample a sensational range of wines there, primarily made with three indigenous grapes: hárslevelű, the most floral; the furmint grape, which lends a particularly concentrated taste to its wine because of trace deposits of volcanic debris in the soil; and the *cépage* that lured me here, juhfark. Meaning “ewe’s tail,” it is almost exclusively grown on Somló’s hillsides. According to lore, juhfark is meant to be consumed by a couple on their wedding night in hopes of conceiving a male child. That reputation may also have something to do with the way juhfark’s ethereal perfume and deep minerality distract newlyweds from realizing how strong the wine actually is, which gets them inebriated and copulatory in no time at all. Candlelight is recommended.

The wines of Imre Györgykovács are all about purity, elegance, and a beguiling saltiness. When I tasted them at the Wine Shop, they made me think of transparent horses galloping through rivers of molten lava. Lean and strong, with their musculature carried by vertebrae of volcanic stoniness. Above all, his wines are *harmonious*.

“In the past, Somló wines were drunk when they were well-aged,” Györgykovács says, when we meet for a tasting at his ancient cellar midway up the hill. “They were light wines—low in alcohol, high in acidity, and exceptionally long-lived.”

Did they taste anything like Somló’s wines do today?

“It’s hard to say what they tasted like, because the chain was broken,” he says, shaking his head. “During World War II, all the old stocks of local wine were drunk by Russian soldiers. And throughout the Communist era, people were forced to make industrial wines for the state. So nobody remembers what they used to be like.”

Györgykovács’ father, carrying on his ancestors’ wine-making tradition, had produced wine under the Communist regime, but his connection to the past had been unmoored by the 20th century’s upheavals.

“My father was born in 1919 and became a soldier in 1941, so he was too young to have learned anything about winemaking,” he continues. “By the time he returned, it was the late 1940s, and everything had been destroyed. We’re still trying to rediscover how things are supposed to be.”

Bodó, who rescued me from the fog on my first day in Hungary, echoes this sentiment in Tokaj, a half-day’s drive away, where her winery is known for its dry whites.

“Here too, as in Somló, we don’t really know what the wines are supposed to be like,” she tells me. “People used to know which varieties did best in which climates, but they erased that knowledge from people’s minds under Communism. All the wines here belonged to the government monopoly, and all they cared about was quantity.”

Since the end of state rule in 1990, winemakers have been finding new ways to allow Tokaj’s terroir to express itself. The soil here too consists of volcanic hillsides, although the region is of a much vaster size than Somló.

In Bodó’s and other producers’ eyes, making dry Tokaji

Tasting Notes

Hungarian Whites

While most of the wines from the Somló and Tokaj regions share a complex minerality, key nuances set them apart and dictate food pairings.

Fekete Juhfark

SOMLÓ

All of Fekete’s white Somló wines have the strange ability to stab your tongue with microbursts of incredibly rich acidity—that effect is the essence of Somló, and nobody does it better than Fekete. His juhfark in particular is one of the most crystalline wines in the world: Imagine a thousand lemony, smoky, honey-filled points of light cutting into all your tastebuds. Sheer, pure brilliance. \$22; [klwines.com](#)

Bott Furmint Csontos

TOKAJ

Tokaji is a wine so hallowed that people prefer to respect it rather than drink it: It suffers from a reputation of being too special. People open it for marriages and baptisms, but they don’t crack it open on the regular—unless they know about Bott’s Csontos. Named after a cru that means “boney,” Csontos is so powerfully bone-dry as to be almost salty, yet simultaneously contains a beguiling silkiness. It pairs as well with foie gras and shellfish as it does with wiener schnitzel, roasted goat, and Sichuan food. The new Tokaji. \$25; [winehouse.com](#)

Spiegelberg Wedding Night Wine

SOMLÓ

Former BMW test driver István Spiegelberg makes precisely calibrated Somló whites, including this strangely named cuvée that harkens back to the ancient folk belief that drinking Somlói juhfark on one’s wedding night (as the Habsburg emperors did) would lead to the birth of male children. Let’s put it this way: It’s a white wine filled with testosterone. \$40; [bluedanubewine.com](#)

Szepesy Furmint Estate

TOKAJ

About 10 years ago, the legendary István Szepesy realized “in an explosive way” that dry wines are what he is supposed to be making in Tokaj, where terroirs are best known for their sweet dessert elixirs. Any furmint by Szepesy showcases the region’s extraordinary minerality. \$27; [thedrinkshop.com](#)

Samuel Tinon Dry Szamorodni

TOKAJ

Samuel Tinon is, like the region of Tokaj itself, mainly known for his sweet wines, but he makes an extraordinary *sous-voile*, or intentionally oxidized, dry szamorodni that has to be tasted to be believed. Making szamorodni is an ancient tradition here, even though the wine may seem to have more in common with a *vin jaune* from the Jura or a sherry than it does with classic Tokaji. Tinon’s take on this forgotten treasure is exquisite. \$46; [bluedanubewine.com](#)



The heat of Hungary's rich, paprika-laced stew, *pörkölt* (above), can be perfectly tempered with a healthy dollop of cooling sour cream. A winemaker's house (right) in Somló.



Hungarian Braised Beef with Paprika (*Pörkölt*)

Serves 6 to 8

Active: 45 min.; Total: 4 hr.

Known everywhere, except in Hungary, as goulash (there, what is known as *gulyás* is in fact much soupier), this stew is made with a generous amount of paprika and cooked down until the meat is fork-tender and the sauce thick and hearty. Unlike other spices, Hungarian paprika powder should not be fried in the cooking oil, advises Éva Cartwright, owner of the Somló Borok Boltja wine shop, because it tends to burn and can give the stew an unpleasant bitter taste. Mild Hungarian green peppers are essential to the flavor in this dish (see page 76), but banana peppers can be used as a substitute.

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup rendered pork lard or vegetable oil
- 12 oz. oxtail, cut into 1-inch-thick rounds (have your butcher do this)
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. beef shoulder, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 large yellow onions, roughly chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 cups red wine
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Hungarian sweet paprika (thespicehouse.com)
- 4 Hungarian wax peppers, stemmed, seeded, and thinly sliced crosswise
- 2 vine-ripe tomatoes, cored and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch wedges
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Sour cream and gherkins, for serving

1 In a large saucepan, heat the lard over medium-high. Add the oxtails and cook, turning, until golden brown, about 6 minutes. Transfer the oxtails to a bowl and return the pan to the heat. Add the beef and cook, stirring, until brown and caramelized in spots, about 12 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the beef to the bowl with the oxtails and return the pan to the heat.

2 Add the onions to the pan and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 5 minutes. Stir in the garlic, cook for 2 minutes, then return the oxtails and beef to the pan along with the wine, paprika, peppers, and tomatoes. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low, and cook, covered, until the beef is tender and the sauce is reduced, about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 hours. Remove the pan from the heat and season with salt and pepper. Serve the *pörkölt* with a dollop of sour cream and gherkins on the side.

The wines grown on these slopes are renowned for taking on the soil's smoky characteristics, and are traditionally described as “fiery”—filled with a magma-like intensity

has been a huge advance, so she views the region's historical challenges in a hopeful light. “I don't see the rupture of 1945 to 1990 as a tragedy,” she explains. “In fact, I find it exciting. We are essentially the first generation in Tokaj that has the opportunity to get quality levels back to where they're supposed to be. We're basically a new wine region with five hundred years of history behind us—how amazing is that?”

One of the most interesting names in the region is Samuel Tinon, a fifth-generation winemaker from Bordeaux who makes renowned sweet aszú wines, as well as fascinating dry szamorodni wines that have an oxidative, nutty edge more typically associated with Jura or Jerez. They've been made in Hungary for centuries.

“I'm a specialist in sous-voile szamorodni,” Tinon tells me on the afternoon I visit his winery, mentioning the process of exposing the wine to air while it remains protected by a layer, or veil, of yeast cells, which gives the final product its distinctive flavor. “And I feel strongly that you cannot replace the sweet wines of Tokaj with dry wines. You need both. To only make dry wines would mean losing the key to this place. Dry wines could simply be a trend—and fashions come and go. The important thing is working in accordance with traditions.”

This notion of moving things forward by maintaining traditions was echoed by the last person I met with in Hungary, who also happens to be the country's most important winemaker: István Szepsy. In many ways, he is the strongest remaining connector between the Hungarian wine world of today and its all but severed past. Not only did he make wines for the state monopoly during the Communist era, but his ancestor Máté Szepsi Lacko (a priest in the early 1600s) was the first to set down in writing the method of making aszú wine using botrytised grapes.

Given this lineage, it's no surprise that Szepsy today makes magnificent aszú wines—but he also produces a range of extraordinary dry wines, as I learn at a tasting in his home. They taste like something chiseled from lava and marble, yet with a quartz-like crystalline purity.

Later that day, as we drive through the crus of Mád and Tállya, Szepsy shows me shriveled, botrytis-mold-encased raisins still hanging on the vines. These will be used to make his award-winning sweet wines. We get out of the car and, standing on a dormant volcano, Szepsy gestures over the fog-coated valley beneath us.

“This is where I believe it is possible to produce the most exceptional dry wines in the world,” he says. “It will take time to get there, of course. But we're on our way.” ■

Travel Guide

SOMLÓ & TOKAJ

WHERE TO STAY

Kisfalucska Vendégház

First built in 1890, then renovated in 2000, this affordable, charming guest house sleeps eight. *Petőfi u. 16, Bodrogkeresztúr, Tokaj; kisfalucska.hu/kisfalucska/vendeghaz*

Sallai Vendégház

Somló isn't much for tourism amenities at this point, so it's better as a day trip from Budapest, a couple hours' drive away. But if you want to overnight in Somló, this no-frills inn is run by the good people at the highly recommended Somló Wine Shop, and is a perfectly lovely place to rest your head after a day of imbibing local wines. *Eighth main road, Veszprém County, Somló; somlohegy.szallas.hu*

WHERE TO EAT

Sárga Borház

The food and wine at this humble establishment are world-class. Located on the same property as the Disznókő winery, Sárga Borház offers classic countryside dishes like grilled goose liver, fried mushrooms, roasted duck legs, and a must-try take on *cigánypecsenye*, a garlicky Roma-inspired pork dish that positively sings when paired with dry furmint. *Mezőzombor, 37, Tokaj; sargaborhaz.hu*

WHERE TO DRINK

To schedule appointments for tours or sample the wines at these local wineries, it's best to make arrangements in advance.

Bott Pince Winery

3910 Tokaj, Szerelmi Pincesor 11, Tokaj; bottpince.hu

Fekete Winery

8481 Somlónásárhely, Somló; feketepincesomlo.hu/en

István Szepsy

3909 Mád, Batthyány út 59, Tokaj; szepsy.hu

Samuel Tinon

3933 Olaszliszka, Bánom út 8, Tokaj; samueltinon.com/english/the-domaine

Somló Wine Shop

Somlónásárhely, Somló-hegy, külterület hrsz., 1321, Somló; somloi.hu/en



The legendary Jerry Thomas mixing a Blue Blazer, one of the vast profusion of sporty American drinks that followed in the wake of the cocktail.

ANCIENT MYSTERY REVEALED! ORIGIN OF THE COCKTAIL DISCOVERED! ANCESTRY BURIED IN A HORSE'S BEHIND! SHOCKING DETAILS!

Spirits historian

DAVID WONDRICH

finally (almost) gets to the bottom of where
the cocktail came from, and how it got its name



F

or 15 years, I've been trying to figure out why we call a cocktail a cocktail and where this most useful little invention came from in the first place. Not long ago, my quest saw me poking around a sun-dappled, quiet old churchyard in the pleasant town of Lewiston, New York, where Catherine Hustler—the woman who most assuredly maybe invented the cocktail—sleeps her sleep. More recently, it found me fiddling with my phone on London's busy Borough High Street, just south of London Bridge, as the lunchtime crowds swirled around me, trying to get a decent picture of an anodyne modern office building distinguished only by the three sculpted blue musicians walking, for reasons of their own, straight up its façade. Here, 300 years before the arrival of the blue musicians, stood the apothecary shop of one Richard Stoughton, who quite possibly also invented the cocktail.

The history of the cocktail—and here I mean the original cocktail, the ur-mixture of spirits, bitters, sugar, and water that spawned the whole enticing tribe—has (perhaps not surprisingly) always been like this: heady with false leads and spiked with treacherous *maybes*. Indeed, while it's become much easier to find a proper cocktail in the last 15 years, the state of knowledge about the cocktail's origin and etymology really hasn't progressed much since William Grimes summed it up in his landmark 1991 history of American mixology, *Straight Up or On the Rocks*: "The word 'cocktail' ... remains one of the most elusive in the language."

There were plenty of theories floating around in old cocktail books, most of them swiped from newspapers and based on nothing more solid than supposition, it-stands-to-reason, and even out-and-out fiction. According to these accounts, the cocktail was invented in Mexico and named after an Aztec princess; in New Orleans and named after a French egg cup; in Four Corners, New York, by one Betsy Flanagan; world without end. There was no proof for any of them. Consensus, anyway, had it that the cocktail was an American drink—at least that's what Charles Dickens and a host of other smell-fungus British travelers visiting America in the 1830s and 1840s grudgingly conceded. As for the name, the great H.L. Mencken sat down in 1945 to thresh out the question, finding

seven plausible theories. Plausible, but not probable: None had any direct evidence to support it. Things had advanced little by the time Grimes got to the question.

While writing the biography of Jerry Thomas, the man who wrote the first bartender's guide, it was more or less obligatory for me to tackle the origin of the cocktail itself. An academic in a past life, I fell back on my training and assembled the earliest references to the drink I could find. There were three, each of them considered canonical. The first is the Betsy Flanagan story, which is found in one of James Fenimore Cooper's more obscure novels, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground*, set in Westchester County, New York, during the dark days when it was a violent no-man's-land between the Continental Army and the British.

In the book, the salty Elizabeth "Betty" (not Betsy, as legend has it) Flanagan keeps a rough tavern, and Cooper characterizes her as "the inventor of that beverage which is so well known at the present hour [i.e., 1821], to all the patriots who make a winter's march between [New York City and Albany], and which is distinguished by the name of 'cock-tail.'" Then there was the well-worn 1806 citation from the Hudson, New York, *Balance and Columbian Repository*, a political paper that defined a cocktail as that mixture of spirits, sugar, water, and bitters that we know today. Finally, there's a widely quoted line from Washington Irving's *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, first published in 1809, in which he describes the Marylanders as laying claim to "those recondite beverages, cock-tail, stonefence and sherry-cobbler."

An afternoon at the New York Public Library let me eject Irving's unruly Marylanders from the story. The cocktail, it turns out, is one of the many things he slipped into the 1848 "Author's Revised Edition" of his book. By then, he could have gotten a cocktail at any bar (and after 40-odd years of editing his book he probably needed one). Yet another visit to the library brought the no doubt equally unruly New Hampshireites into the story (back then, pretty much all Americans were unruly). A computerized newspaper database—something neither Grimes nor Mencken had access to—kicked up an article from that state satirizing the fast young men of its day by printing what was purportedly an extract from one of their diaries. In it, the hungover young gent, feeling "rather squally," drinks "a glass of cocktail" and pronounces it "excellent for the head." That was in 1803, making it the earliest known reference to the drink.

Based on those three documents and a few other mentions I turned up in New York newspapers of the 1810s, I concluded in *Imbibe* (as I titled my book when it came out in 2007) that the cocktail was first named and popularized somewhere in the Hudson Valley, or at least in the rough triangle between Boston, Albany, and New York. As for where it was born—well,

unfortunately for my pride as an American and a New Yorker, I couldn't stop at just looking into the word itself; I had to look into the cocktail before it was called the cocktail.

Using those new digital databases, I began looking into the cocktail's formula, and in particular the bitters, its defining ingredient (without them, it was merely a "sling," an older drink of not much interest). It didn't take long to turn up a plethora of ads in London newspapers of the 1690s and early 1700s for the "Elixir Magnum Stomachicum" that our man Richard Stoughton sold from his apothecary shop south of London Bridge. "Stoughton's Bitters," as they came to be called, were the same sort of concentrated extract of roots, barks, peels, and such that bars are dashing all over the place today, and in his ads

he recommended taking them in brandy or wine as a hangover cure. The brandy of the day was generally sweetened, as was the Canary wine he recommended, which puts us perilously close to the definition of the cocktail and makes Dr. Stoughton the inventor of the cocktail, and his shop—it took me until last year to pinpoint its exact location on Borough High Street—its birthplace.

In any case, by the middle of the 1700s, gin and bitters, brandy and bitters, and wine and bitters all appear frequently on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, in May 1783, when British officers were meeting with George Washington and his staff to arrange the British surrender of New York, "Washington

pulled out his watch," as the Loyalist William Smith recorded in his diary, "and observing that it was near Dinner Time, offered Wine and Bitters." With this we should bear in mind the New Orleans *Daily Picayune's* 1844 observation that "although the term of 'wine-and-bitters' be in appearance specific, it is indeed one of the most generic which the wealth of the English language furnishes," and it is easily comprehended as the cocktail itself. Was the Father of His Country the host of the first cocktail hour on record? It's possible.

Well, if the formula was an English one, at least the name of the cocktail was American, or so I believed, although I still couldn't adequately explain it. Then the Internet threw a curveball. The year after I published *Imbibe*, the drink historians Jared Brown and Anistatia Miller pulled another massive nugget from the online newspaper databases: a 1798 mention of the word "cocktail" in a satirical item (one does detect a theme) claiming to be the long, itemized bar tab a bunch of legislators ran up at a local watering hole during their most recent session. The curve: The newspaper was a London one and the legislators were, well, British. So. The cocktail, our cherished national institution, is not ours at all?

After moping around for a few days, or maybe months, I pulled myself together and started to look into this new bit of evidence, discovering that, while it wasn't quite what it seemed,

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BEEN LIKE THIS: HEADY
WITH FALSE LEADS AND
SPIKED WITH
TREACHEROUS MAYBES**

The Early Cocktails

Before the martini or manhattan came around, these concoctions raised drinkers' spirits



①

Sherry & Bitters

This is what George Washington served his British guests, as far as we can tell (although he would have used different bitters and it's doubtful his version had ice; use it anyway). In an ice-filled cocktail shaker, stir 2 oz. amontillado sherry with 4 dashes Peychaud's bitters. Strain into a small, stemmed sour glass and twist 1 orange peel over top.

②

Richard Stoughton's Purl Royal

"Purl royal" was wine with bitter herbs steeped in it; Stoughton advertised his bitters as a quick and easy way to make it, inventing the cocktail in the process. In a 2-oz. sherry glass, stir 1 ½ oz. Rainwater madeira with ½ tsp. each Angostura bitters and Campari.



③

Cock-Tail

The old-fashioned old-fashioned, so to speak: the drink as it was made back at the turn of the 19th century. In a cocktail shaker, stir 1 tsp. demerara sugar with 3 dashes Angostura bitters and 2 teaspoons hot water until the sugar dissolves. Pour in 2 oz. Genever and 1 oz. cold water, fill with ice, and stir well. Strain the liquid into a chilled 6-oz. tumbler and garnish with freshly grated nutmeg.

④

Dr. Mitchill's Cocktail

The prominent New York physician and politician Samuel Mitchill described this bitters-less version of the cocktail in an 1820 temperance lecture; it still cocks the tail. In a 6-oz. tumbler, stir 2 tsp. honey with ½ oz. hot water until the honey dissolves. Pour in 1 ½ oz. Smith & Cross Jamaican rum, 1 oz. cold water, and 1 large ice cube. Stir well and garnish with freshly grated nutmeg.

it nonetheless unlocked the solution to the drink's name. The explanation gets a little close-grained, but I'll try to be as clear as I can. The 1798 mention reads thus: "[Mr. Pitt] 'cock-tail' (vulgarly called ginger)." There's also a price: three-quarters of a pence. That turns out to be key, since it's the second-cheapest drink on the list, and priced far below anything with spirits in it. If it's a cocktail, it's not our cocktail. What, then, could it be? This brings us to that "ginger." First of all, the author's "vulgarly called" is a bit of (weak) wordplay, since "ginger" is in fact the official, common name and "cocktail" the slang term, albeit a most obscure one. (The sporting writer John Badcock put it properly in his 1825 *Sportsman's Slang* when he stated simply: "Cock-tail—is ginger"). But if "cock-tail" is a nickname for this ginger beverage, then why was it called that?

The answer, I believe, is both weird and rather gloriously distasteful, but sometimes history is like that. Among the many curious definitions found in Francis Grose's 1785 *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, a work with which I have been obsessed for nigh on 30 years, is the one for the verb "to feague" (aka "to fig"), which Grose defines as to put "ginger up a horse's fundament, to make him lively and carry his tail well." A horse dealer would do this before exhibiting the poor ginger-suppositoried beast for sale, a raised or cocked-up tail being a sign of a spirited horse. Grose goes on to add that the term is "used figuratively for encouraging or spiring one up." Yes, well.

Confirmation that feaguing and "cock-tail" are indeed related is provided by a little piece of political satire printed in 1790 in a provincial English newspaper, in which the writer, deploying the term in (I hope) the figurative sense, claims that a certain clergyman "hath been guilty of monopolizing all the ginger and pepper in the neighbourhood, to make the asses who vote for Sir Gerald Vanneck cock their tails." That's also how "cock-tail" seems to be deployed in *The Prelateiad*, an almost impenetrably obscure Dublin verse satire from 1789, which refers to cayenne pepper's "cock-tail virtue."

If "cocktail" is being used here as a compound noun—structured like "kill-joy," "cut-purse," and "bust-head"—that means "pepper-upper," then that's exactly what Henry Irvine, an English correspondent of Mencken's, theorized in 1938. Mencken printed the conjecture as the fifth of his seven etymologies, but neither he nor Irvine could cite anything to prove it. Now, we've got the evidence—and small wonder that it was well-hidden; the practice of feaguing loses its usefulness the more widely it is known, and this use of "cock-tail" would have been confined narrowly to sporting circles.

In England, the cocktail remained the stimulant—ginger or sometimes hot pepper—that you added to a drink, which is how we find Badcock using it in 1828 when he talks about "gin and beer, or both, combined with a scratch or two of cock-tail in it." In America, however, we extended the name of the spicy element to cover the whole shebang, as we can see from the recollection by William Crawford, a Pennsylvania farmer-distiller, that in the years after the Revolution he used to drink "'Cock-tail' with pepper in it." By 1806, we had dropped the ginger and the cayenne for the more palatable (and shelf-stable, an important consideration in the American hinterland) bitters. Thus did the very English gin-and-bitters become the very American gin cocktail—which, as if to live up

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DISTASTEFUL, BUT SOMETIMES
HISTORY IS LIKE THAT**



to its name, was generally considered a morning drink for the first half-century of its existence.

Of course, we still don't know everything. We still don't know who switched the ginger or pepper for the bitters. There is one surprising avenue for further research: our old friend Betty Flanagan. Sure, Cooper's tale was fictional, but word was he consulted actual veterans of the Revolution while writing *The Spy*, and based many of his characters on them. In Elmsford, New York, the town that included Four Corners, a tradition survived well into the 20th century that she was one of them, if you can call her a veteran, and that her tavern was the old Ledger House, then still standing at the corner of Saw Mill River Road and Tarrytown Road. Cooper lived in nearby Scarsdale while he was writing *The Spy*, and could easily have picked up that tradition. Meanwhile, Lewiston, where I spent the afternoon poking around the churchyard, also had—and still has—a tradition: that Betty Flanagan was based on Catherine "Kitty" Hustler, who moved there from Westchester, along with her husband, Thomas, in 1800 and kept an inn until their deaths many years later. Yes, it sounds pretty sketchy, but the thing is I can't for the life of me disprove it—yet. The cocktail beat goes on. ■



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TRAVEL THE WORLD. TASTE THE EXPERIENCE.

THE OKINAWA LESSONS

WHITE SAND
BEACHES,
BULLFIGHTS, AND
BITTER MELON.

LAURIE WOOLEVER

TASTES AND
COOKS HER WAY
THROUGH THE
UNIQUE LANDSCAPE
AND CULINARY
HERITAGE OF THIS
REMOTE AND
ATYPICAL JAPANESE
ARCHIPELAGO



Photographs by Andréa Fazzari



The author (above center, right) in the home kitchen of a cooking instructor. The islands' local ingredients include *shima-dofu* (a type of tofu, above left, with salted fish) and *goya* (bitter melon, right). Opposite: Okinawa's Cape Zanpa.

M

y first meal in Okinawa, a Japanese prefecture known for the extraordinary longevity of its people thanks to a traditionally vegetable-intensive diet devoid of processed foods, was a crispy and insanely delicious fried thing, more chicken hand than chicken finger, purchased at a Lawson *konbini* (convenience store). For dessert, I ate all of the smoky, dark brown Okinawa sugar from my hotel room tea service, then drank a cold Orion, the local beer, in my bathtub at Ryukyu Onsen Senagajima, where I spent my first few days napping off jet lag and soaking in an outdoor *onsen* (or hot spring) overlooking dramatic rock outcroppings on the fringes of the East China Sea. The polyglot cuisine, lush flora, and laid-back vibe of this extraordinary subtropical island chain, once the independent Ryukyu Kingdom, make it seem, at times, more like Hawaii or Southern California than Japan.

Japan-obsessed Western chefs and writers have tended to ignore Okinawa in their pilgrimages, and there are woefully few English-language resources about the cooking of the region, which has been shaped by Okinawa's history of trade with (and in some cases, occupation by) China, Malaysia, Korea, the Philippines, Portugal, and the U.S.

Writer Matt Goulding spent nine months in Japan in the service of his recent, indispensable gastro-travel guide, *Rice, Noodle, Fish: Deep Travels Through Japan's Food Culture*, covering more than 5,000 miles on the ground, but says, "Truth is, I never made it to Okinawa. The food was so different, and ultimately a diversion from the larger central themes drawn out by the mainland cuisine." Even chef Roy Yamaguchi, whose mother is Okinawan, said that before he opened his first restaurant there last spring, "I'd not really spent much time in Okinawa," which he called "the lost child of Japan."

Until recently, the sum of my own knowledge about Okinawa had come from multiple adolescent screenings of *The Karate Kid, Part II* and a glance at a handful of dry nutrition guides. I decided to go and see for myself this part of Japan that everyone else had been skipping over in favor of Tokyo, Kyoto, and Hokkaido. I would visit donut stands and izakayas and cafés and *konbini*, wander the markets and streets and farm fields, but I also wanted to learn by doing, from the people who knew the food best, so I lined up three cooking classes, each with a different teacher, wrapped up my knives and notebooks, and took a long-haul flight.

A hotel breakfast buffet can be decadent and gut-busting, but the one I encountered on the island of Senagajima was long on tofu, fish, vegetables, soups, and tea. The ubiquitous bitter melon, or *goya*, a high-fiber, vitamin C-packed digestive aid that lowers blood glucose, was available to guests in four forms: raw, sautéed with carrots, deep-fried into chips, and cooked into a sweet jam to be spread on alarmingly labeled “embryo bread.”

After a run around the island, with a pause to watch a youth baseball game in progress, I had my first bowl of Okinawa soba at Anjina Beach Café, adjacent to the wide, shallow bay between Senagajima and Okinawa-honto, the prefecture’s main island, where windsurfers take advantage of sharp breezes. Unlike mainland Japan’s buckwheat-based noodles, springy Okinawa soba is made from wheat flour and eggs. The broth is a pork-enriched dashi, the bowl completed with sweet braised pork belly (*rafute*) or loin ribs (*soki*), sliced fish cake, red pickled ginger, and scallions. Served alongside is *ko-regexu*, a condiment of tiny hot peppers suspended in *awamori*, a strong Okinawan spirit distilled from Thai long-grain rice that’s a popular beverage in Okinawa’s izakayas. This particular bowl also contained *asa*, bright green, micro-fibrous sea lettuce that reminded me of something found inside one’s bathing suit after a long day at the beach.

I spent the next afternoon at the Ishikawa Dome in Uruma City, in the center of the main island, drinking Orion, eating freshly cooked yakisoba with



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ARMED
WITH THEIR
GRANDMOTHERS’
RECIPES

pork belly, sausage, cabbage, and carrots and watching a series of relatively bloodless Okinawa-style bullfights, in which two massive animals pushed each other around the ring by their horns until one retreated in defeat, each living to fight again.

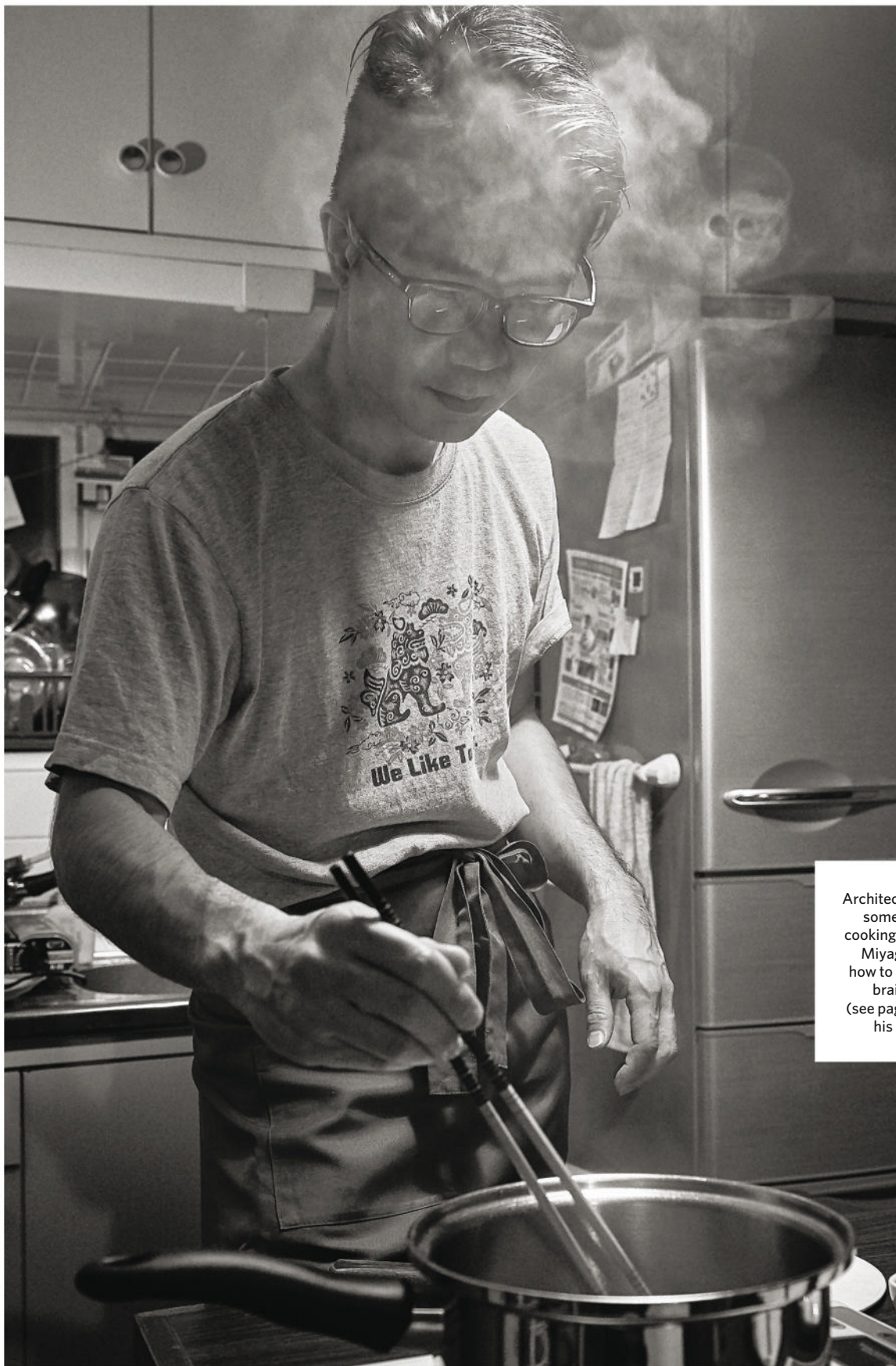
Later, I visited Urizun, a dark, smoky izakaya in the capital city of Naha, to begin my deep dive into *goya champuru*, a bitter melon stir-fry with eggs, tofu, and sometimes pork or Spam, seasoned with dashi and soy sauce and garnished with bonito flakes. *Champuru* means “mix,” referring to the jumble of ingredients and flavors—by turns bitter, salty, sour, sweet, and earthy—that compose this defining Okinawan dish. And the next day I was back in the center of Okinawa-honto, in the town of Kin, home of the U.S. Marine base Camp Hansen and self-proclaimed birthplace of “taco rice,” which is your basic Middle America-style ground beef taco, with white rice standing in for the tortilla. Like Spam musubi in Hawaii and *budae jjigae* in Korea, taco rice is a Western-Asian hybrid dish, born of a strong American military presence here, and people in Okinawa love it. The plate I tried at King Taco was tasty, but once was enough—I didn’t feel the need to spend any more time passing the Old El Paso.

That evening, I began cooking. My first instructor was a young man named Atsushi Miyagi. He teaches architecture at Sci-Tech College in Naha by day and home cooking by night. Atsushi lives in Urasoe, a small city just outside of Naha that’s home to the Orion beer brewery; Camp Kinser, another Marine Corps base; and eight smoky pachinko parlors that throb with blazing lights. I’d found Atsushi on govoyagin.com, where visitors to Japan connect with locals who will help them harvest sugarcane, attend sumo wrestling practice, or, in my case, learn to cook *rafute* and *goya champuru*, if not from actual centenarians, then from young Okinawans armed with their grandmothers’ recipes.

Before the lesson, we stopped at Kanehide supermarket to buy *shima-dofu*, Okinawan tofu that’s coagulated in a magnesium chloride brine, making it saltier than average. It also has a low water content, which lends it a firm (continued on page 68)



Mozuku seaweed is marinated in vinegar, soy sauce, and mirin and served with cucumber and Chinese yam (see page 73 for recipe).



Architecture professor and sometime Okinawan cooking instructor Atsushi Miyagi demonstrates how to cook *rafute*, sweet braised pork belly (see page 73 for recipe) in his home kitchen.





Bitter Melon and Tofu Stir-Fry with Pork Belly and Eggs

Serves 4

Active: 35 min.; Total: 1 hr. 15 min.

Soft tofu, scrambled eggs, and rich pork belly stand up to the astringent bitter melon flesh in this flavorful stir-fry. Salting the melon leaches out much of its harsh tannins, so don't skip this step or the dish will be unpalatably bitter.

- 3** small bitter melons (about 12 oz.; see page 75)
- 2** Tbsp. kosher salt
- 7** oz. extra-firm tofu
- 1** Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 4** oz. pork belly, skin removed, thinly sliced crosswise
- 1/3** cup dashi (see page 73 for recipe)
- 1** Tbsp. soy sauce
- 2** large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1/4** cup bonito flakes (amazon.com) Koregusu (nishikidori.com; optional)

1 Cut each bitter melon in half lengthwise and, using a spoon, remove and discard the seeds. Slice the bitter melons crosswise into 1/4-inch-thick half-moons and transfer to a medium bowl. Add the salt, toss until evenly combined, and let stand for 20 minutes. Using your hands, squeeze the bitter melon to release as much liquid as possible, then transfer to a colander and rinse under cold running water. Squeeze again to drain any liquid, transfer to paper towels, and pat dry.

2 Place the tofu on a flat plate lined with a kitchen towel. Cover the tofu with another towel and plate and then weight the plate with two 32-oz. cans to press the tofu and release excess water. Let the tofu stand for at least 20 minutes. Remove the weights and uncover the tofu. Using your hands, crumble the tofu into 1-inch pieces into a large bowl.

3 In a 12-inch skillet, heat the oil over high. Add the bitter melon and pork and cook, undisturbed, for 5 minutes. Stir and cook 2 minutes more. Add the tofu along with the dashi and soy sauce and cook until the liquid has almost completely evaporated, about 1 minute. Pour in the eggs and cook, stirring to break up the curds, until the eggs are just cooked, 1 to 2 minutes more. Remove the skillet from the heat and scrape the stir-fry onto a serving platter. Sprinkle with bonito flakes and serve immediately with the koregusu, if using.



(continued from page 64) consistency. It was nearly 7 p.m., but the *shima-dofu* was still warm, indicating, said Atsushi, that it had been made within the hour.

Atsushi's bikes and surfboards stood in a corner of the kitchen. In lieu of a stove, he'd plugged in a single-induction burner on a small dining table. He was rather shy, his English good but not great, and his teaching style was more demonstrative than hands-on as he silently filled a pot with water, added a few splashes of *awamori* and a dash of salt and placed it on the burner, cut the skin from the pork, and slipped it into the pot. I'm something of a nervous talker, especially with strangers, but I'd already used up all the polite questions I could muster on the car ride over, and as the steps he took with the food were utterly self-evident, I could think of no new ones to ask. I knew that the pork would take at least 90 minutes to braise, and that *goya champuru* was a rather quick dish, so I descended into a language-barrier-induced awkwardness panic spiral when Atsushi, likely feeling the same, turned on the television in the next room. Sugary Japanese pop music stood in for the long silences

Instructor Kazumi Kayo (above) is one of the local cooking experts who are preserving Okinawa's classic dishes, like spinach and tofu salad with peanut-miso dressing (opposite top left); noodles in dashi with miso-coated pork belly (opposite bottom right); and braised pork belly with leeks and ginger (opposite top right). Recipes start on page 67.

between bits of instruction, and eventually he handed me a spoon to scoop out the bitter pith of the *goya*, while he peeled and sliced ginger for the pork braise.

It occurred to me that this experience, while less structured than I'd anticipated, was not unlike cooking with family—in the home, as it's needed, with no pretense. I had a slug of *awamori* when Atsushi stepped away for a moment, just as I might have nipped a sip of Carlo Rossi when learning to cook with my mother as a teenager. The *goya champuru* we made together was the best of my trip.

Nao Ogura-Gayler, whose one-woman school is the aptly named Cooking Class with Nao, was my second teacher. She lives and teaches in Yomitan, where Torii Station Army Base and Kadena Air Base supply a steady stream of students eager to cook with warty-looking *goya* and dried seaweed. A former marketing professional, Nao teaches introductory Japanese cooking and sushi classes in addition to Okinawan dishes. She sharpened her Japanese culinary skills in London as a student of Narihito and Yoshie Matsunaga, whose consulting company, Mat UK, has helped fuel the rise of sushi



Spinach and Tofu Salad with Peanut-Miso Dressing

Serves 4 to 6

Active: 15 min.; Total: 40 min.

Tofu adds creaminess to this spare salad of spinach dressed with peanut butter and red miso paste. Commercial peanut butters shouldn't be used here, as their stabilizers would thicken the dressing too much.

- 14 oz. silken tofu
- 3 oz. spinach leaves, trimmed and thinly sliced
- 2 Tbsp. natural peanut butter
- 2 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 1 Tbsp. red miso paste

1 Place the tofu on a flat plate lined with a kitchen towel. Cover the tofu with another towel and plate and then weight with two 32-oz. cans to press on the tofu and release excess water. Let stand for 20 minutes. Uncover the tofu and crumble it into small, 1/2-inch pieces into a large bowl. Add the spinach and toss gently to combine.

2 In a small bowl, whisk the peanut butter with the soy sauce, miso, and 2 tablespoons water until smooth. Pour the dressing over the tofu and spinach and mix to coat. Transfer to a bowl and serve or refrigerate for 1 hour and serve chilled.

Noodles in Dashi with Miso-Coated Pork Belly

Serves 6

Total: 1 hr.

Red miso paste, more fermented than its blond counterparts, adds piquancy to pork belly cooked with brown sugar, mirin, and sesame seeds—an intense topping served over a simple dashi broth and somen noodles.

- 1 lb. skinless pork belly, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1/2 cup red miso paste
- 3 Tbsp. awamori rice liqueur (wine-searcher.com)
- 3 Tbsp. mirin
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. packed dark brown sugar,

preferably from Okinawa (chefshop.com)

- 2 Tbsp. toasted sesame seeds
- 4 cups dashi (see page 73 for recipe)
- 5 oz. mung bean sprouts
- 9 oz. somen noodles (yummybazaar.com)
- 4 scallions, thinly sliced
- Angel hair chile threads, to garnish (soschefs.com)

1 Heat a 12-inch skillet over medium. Add the pork belly and 1 tablespoon water and cook, stirring, until the fat renders and the pork is golden brown, about 25 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the pork to a paper towel-lined plate and wipe the skillet clean.

2 In a medium bowl, toss the cooked pork with the miso, awamori, mirin, sugar, and 3 tablespoons water until evenly coated. Scrape the pork and sauce into the skillet, return it to medium heat, and cook, stirring, until the liquid reduces and the pork becomes sticky, about 10 minutes. Stir in the sesame seeds and remove the skillet from the heat. (continued on page 73)

restaurants and takeout in Europe.

Over the course of a happy, collaborative afternoon, listening to both traditional sanshin music and Massive Attack, we cooked through a menu that offered variations beyond the ubiquitous *rafute* and *goya champuru*. Mozuku, a brown, slimy-but-crisp seaweed, was in season and being harvested at nearby Fuchaku Beach, so we made a *sunomono* of it and topped it with foamy grated mountain yam. We sliced *goya* for a spicy, sesame-inflected Korean *namul*, and later mixed *goya* with seafood for tempura. We crumbled *shima-dofu* by hand and tossed it with peanut butter, miso, and micro-thin ribbons of intensely bitter umjana leaf.

The standout of the day was *abura miso*, or “fat miso,” for which we diced and rendered pork belly, cooked it with red miso and *awamori*, and combined a dab of it with hot dashi, somen noodles, sprouts, and pepper threads to make a deeply satisfying meal in less than half the time it takes to make a pork stock or braise a slab of belly. The salty miso helps preserve the pork, explained Nao, who also uses it in *onigiri* (rice balls) and to accompany fried eggplant and peppers.

As we sat and slurped somen, I told Nao that I couldn’t wait to add *abura miso* to my own kitchen repertoire. Using seasoned bits of meat as flavoring agents for vegetables and grains is a relatively novel approach for Western cooks looking to Asia for inspiration.

Nao grew up in Saitama Prefecture, near Tokyo, and moved to Okinawa with her British husband only six years ago, but in that time she’s observed, especially among younger generations, a turn away from the traditionally moderate, vegetable-driven Okinawan diet toward larger portions, more meat, processed foods, and heavy drinking. While many of her students are American, European, and Australian expats, she has also taught Okinawan dishes to natives. She said, “Local people have asked me how to make Okinawa soba from scratch, which is pretty ironic.”

The curriculum at Yonner Food, the Naha cooking school where I had my final lesson, was originally designed for tourists, but my teacher, Kazumi Kayo, said that many of her students, too, are local Oki-



JAPAN-OBSESSED WESTERN CHEFS HAVE IGNORED OKINAWA IN THEIR PILGRIMAGES, AND THERE ARE FEW ENGLISH- LANGUAGE RESOURCES ABOUT THE COOKING OF THE REGION

nawans seeking to learn the pork belly and *goya* lessons they may have missed in homes full of dashi powders and Western conveniences. Kazumi studied with Okinawa food authority Kayoko Matsumoto and perfected her recipes with the help of her mother-in-law.

Kazumi and her translator, Saki Kinjo, guided me through the Maki-shi Public Market, a multi-story series of connected arcades on busy, garish Kokusai Street, which is equal parts wet market, food hall, and souvenir center. Familiar with chefs’ tales of 2 a.m. visits to Tokyo’s Tsukiji seafood market, I was surprised to see, at 10 a.m., that some Makishi merchants were just opening their stalls, stacking mini pineapples, and setting fish out on ice.

“We start later in Okinawa,” said Kazumi with a smile, noting that the market stays open until 8 p.m. I’d just availed myself of an approximately 950-course Japanese breakfast at my hotel, but as we gathered *goya*, pork, just-shaved bonito flakes, warm *shima-dofu*, and dried seaweed for the lesson, I couldn’t resist a freshly fried *sata andagi*, a cake-style Okinawan donut rolled in black sesame seeds and Okinawan sugar. As a palate-cleanser, I sampled tiny, salty bubbles of umi budo, the “green caviar” seaweed cultivated in Okinawa and the Philippines.

Shopping done, Kazumi drove us to her teaching kitchen and we got to work on a simple asa and tofu soup, *kufa jushi* (rice studded

with shiitakes and pork), *rafute*, and *goya champuru*. Having tried several variations of *goya champuru* by this point, I was surprised when Kazumi instructed me to slice an onion and grate a carrot for the dish. She explained that their sugars would counter the strong bitterness of the *goya*; it was a concession for Western palates, and while I felt slightly infantilized by the well-meaning gesture, I filed the knowledge away for when I’d try to sell *goya champuru* to my family back home. I also took careful notes on the green *goya* juice we mixed with the juice of an endemic citrus fruit called shikwasa and sweetened with a bit of simple syrup, as I knew that, with a splash of gin, it would make an excellent Okinawan cocktail: at once healthy and indulgent, with the right balance of bitter, sour, herbal, and sweet. ■



Watercress with Spicy Chile and Sesame Vinaigrette

In a large bowl, whisk $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh lemon juice with 2 Tbsp. plus 1 tsp. toasted sesame oil, 1 Tbsp. soy sauce, 1 Tbsp. toasted sesame seeds, 1 tsp. gochugaru (Korean red pepper flakes; spicejungle.com), 1 tsp. packed dark brown sugar, preferably from Okinawa (chefshop.com), and 1 minced garlic clove. Add 8 oz. watercress and toss until evenly coated. Transfer to a bowl and serve immediately. Serves 2.

Travel Guide **OKINAWA**

WHERE TO EAT

Urizun

Choose from more than 100 varieties of *awamori* and sample Okinawan specialties served in tapas-sized portions. 388-5 Asato, Naha; urizun.okinawa

Nishimachi

This 15-seater serves an impeccable bowl of Okinawa soba, with tender pork belly and kamaboko heaped atop chewy fresh wheat noodles. 1-20-13 Nishi St., Naha

Ramen Koryu Naha Matsuyama

Okinawa is soba country, but there's great Hakata-style ramen to be had at Koryu. Skip the lines at the Kokusai-dori branch and head to the quieter Matsuyama location. 1-8-6 Matsuyama, Naha

WHERE TO STAY

Ryukyu Onsen Senagajima

Tiny Senaga Island is home to a few cafés, a baseball park, and this hushed upscale resort. 174-5 Senaga, Tomigusuku; okinawa-senagajima.gloriahotels.com

AGRITOURISM

Ganaha Chikusan Agu Village

Observe, feed, and eat black Agu pigs at this outdoor village with an on-site restaurant. 69 Okawa, Nago; shimakuru.jp

LEARN TO COOK

Cooking Class with Nao

Nao Ogura-Gayler teaches Japanese standards and Okinawan specialties, and offers dedicated sushi-rolling classes. 1414-61 Sobe, Yomitan; okinawa-cooking.com

Yonner Food

After a tour of Makishi Public Market, Kazumi Kayo and Miyagi Yuko help students prepare classic Okinawan dishes, including seaweed soup, *rafute*, and a refreshing goya-based juice. 902-0064 Libra House, room 303, 2-5-8 Yorimiya, Naha; yonnerfood.jp

govoyagin.com

A web hub for booking immersive experiences in Asia, including Atsushi Miyagi's three-course Okinawan cooking seminar, taught in his home.



The Makishi Public Market in Naha, where you can buy fresh seafood from the second-floor vendors, then go upstairs to any of the half-dozen restaurants that will cook it for you for just 500 yen.

(continued from page 69) Meanwhile, heat the dashi in a small saucepan over low and keep warm.

3 Bring a medium saucepan of water to a boil. Add the mung beans and cook for 1 minute. Using a slotted spoon, remove the sprouts and transfer to paper towels to drain. Add the noodles to the boiling water and cook until tender, 2 to 3 minutes. Drain the noodles and divide them evenly among 6 serving bowls. Divide the dashi and mung beans among the bowls and top with the pork, scallions, and chile threads.

Marinated Mozuku Seaweed with Cucumber

Serves 8; Page 65

Total: 15 min.

In Okinawa, mozuku seaweed is eaten simply dressed with vinegar and soy sauce in this small appetizer. If you can't find fresh mozuku, use $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dried mozuku (available from mitsuwa.com), soak in cold water to cover for 20 minutes, and drain.

- 8 oz. fresh mozuku seaweed, drained and rinsed**
- 2 Tbsp. rice vinegar**
- 2 Tbsp. soy sauce**
- 2 tsp. mirin**
- 1 cucumber, peeled and julienned**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ medium Chinese yam, peeled and finely grated**

In a medium bowl, mix the seaweed with the rice vinegar, soy sauce, and mirin. Divide among 8 small bowls or flat-bottomed spoons, top each with some of the cucumber and a dollop of the yam, and serve immediately.

Braised Pork Belly with Leeks and Ginger

Serves 4; Page 69

Active: 50 min.; Total: 2 hr.

Awamori, a lightly sweet rice distillate, is used to blanch and cook, as well as coat in a sticky sauce, the tender cubes of pork belly, flavored with leeks, ginger, and dashi. Okinawa produces its own earthy type of brown sugar by slowly boiling sugarcane juice into deep brown blocks. It is available on chefshop.com, but you can use standard dark brown sugar as a substitute.

- One $1\frac{1}{4}$ -lb. piece pork belly**
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups awamori rice liqueur (wine-searcher.com)**
- 1 Tbsp. plus 1 tsp. kosher salt**
- 2 leeks, white part only (1 halved**

Green Gin Cocktail

Using a box grater, finely grate the dark green skin of 1 medium bitter melon (about 4 oz.) into a large bowl lined with cheesecloth. Gather the edges of the cheesecloth together and twist to squeeze the juice from the bitter melon pulp. Pour 1 tablespoon of the bitter melon juice into a cocktail shaker and save the rest for more cocktails. Add 1 oz. simple syrup, $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. fresh lime juice, and $\frac{3}{4}$ oz. gin to the shaker, fill with ice cubes, and cover. Shake until well-chilled, about 15 seconds, and pour into a tall glass filled with ice. Top the cocktail with 2 oz. soda water and stir gently to combine. Garnish with a lime wheel before serving. Makes 1 cocktail.



- lengthwise, 1 cut crosswise into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick rounds)**
- One 4-inch piece ginger, peeled and thinly sliced**
- 1 cup dashi (see recipe at right)**
- 3 Tbsp. packed dark brown sugar, preferably from Okinawa**
- 3 Tbsp. soy sauce**

1 In a 6-qt. Dutch oven, combine the pork belly with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup awamori, 1 teaspoon salt, and 4 cups water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to maintain a simmer, and cook for 5 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and drain away the cooking liquid.

2 Return the pot to the heat and stir in 1 cup awamori, the remaining 1 tablespoon salt, the halved leek, ginger, and 4 cups water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to maintain a simmer, and cook until the pork is very tender, about 1 hour. Remove from the heat and transfer the pork to a cutting board; discard the cooking liquid and leek. Discard the skin, slice the pork into 2-inch squares, and return the pork to the pot.

3 In a small bowl, whisk the remaining 1 cup awamori with the sliced leek, dashi, brown sugar, and soy sauce and pour into the pot with the pork. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium-high, and cook, turning the pork as needed, until the sauce is glossy and sticking to the pork, about 20 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat and transfer the pork and leeks to a platter to serve.

DASHI

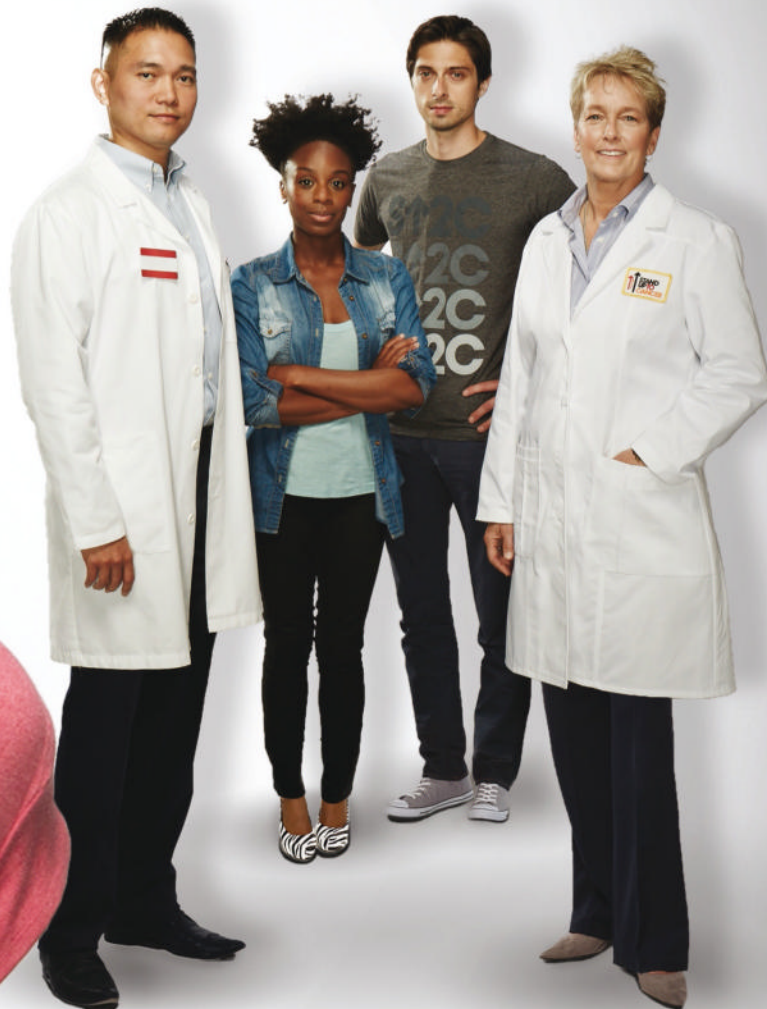
In a small saucepan, combine $\frac{1}{4}$ oz. kombu with 5 cups water and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat, discard kombu, and stir in 1 oz. bonito flakes. Let the dashi stand for 5 minutes, then pour through a fine sieve into a bowl and discard the bonito flakes. Let the dashi cool to room temperature and refrigerate for up to 3 days or until ready to use. Makes 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups.

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• FROM THE SAVEUR •

TEST KITCHEN

Supreming citrus, tomato alternatives, and the ultimate orange bitters



from
Okinawa
page 62

TAMING THE BITTER MELON

The funny-looking, nutritious powerhouse just needs a little love

Green and covered in ridges and pebbly bumps, the bitter melon looks like a weaponized cucumber. And it almost is: The melon contains powerfully bitter compounds. But it's more food miracle than menace. It's packed with vitamin C and is known to reduce blood sugar levels. In Okinawa, *goya*, as bitter melon is known in Japan, is partly credited for the long life spans of residents there. To prepare it, halve it lengthwise and scoop out the white inner pith and seeds with a spoon. Chop or thinly slice the flesh, toss it with salt to leach out some of its bitterness, and then squeeze out its astringent juice. You can stir-fry it (as in *goya champuru*, see page 67 for recipe), juice it for a morning green juice or green gin cocktail (see page 73 for recipe), or blanch it in boiling water, as you would broccoli rabe, for a salad. —Farideh Sadeghin

STEP-BY-STEP: SUPREMING CITRUS

How to free those pretty, glistening segments from all that stuff you don't want to eat

from
Winter
Veggies
page 12



Step 1

In classic French cookery, the “supreme” refers to the choicest part of an ingredient. In the case of citrus, it is the sweet, juicy segments removed from the more bitter pith, peel, and tough inner membrane. Start by trimming the ends of the citrus to expose the flesh.



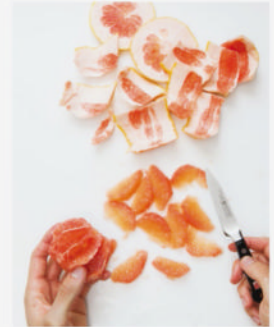
Step 2

Stand the fruit on a cutting board, cut side down. Using a paring knife, carefully cut downward between the flesh and white pith in sloping movements that follow the curve of the fruit. Repeat cutting around the flesh until it is completely exposed.



Step 3

With the fruit in one hand, cut flush against the right side of a membrane toward the center of the fruit and then repeat on the left side of the next membrane until the segment comes free. Repeat cutting along both sides of all the membranes until all the segments are released.



Step 4

Use the citrus segments to top roasted or grilled meat, as a bright relish for heavy desserts like rice pudding, or in the winter salads on page 14. Juice can be squeezed from the spent membranes and the peels can be sliced and cooked with sugar for marmalade.
—Jake Cohen

PICK A HUNGARIAN PEPPER

The importance of a lesser-known cornerstone of Hungarian cooking

Sweet paprika is often seen as the defining ingredient for a proper goulash or its cousin *pörkölt* (see page 54 for recipe). However, as Éva Cartwright, a home cook in Somló, told me recently, the success of those dishes, and much of Hungarian food, relies on the Hungarian wax pepper, a *capsicum* with a particularly mild spiciness and floral aroma. “The wax peppers form the base of our cooking—they’re as essential to us as celery and onions are in French cooking,” says Cartwright. “Banana peppers offer the closest equivalent outside of Hungary to match the wax pepper’s flavor. Red, yellow, or green bell peppers can be used, but in half the amount because they will make the dish too sweet.” Once difficult to source in the U.S., Hungarian wax peppers are now available in farmers’ markets and online at produce purveyor melissas.com. —Ben Mims

from
Hungary
page 48



“Nobody’s sure exactly what bitters do in a cocktail, but **everyone agrees that it’s more than simply making it bitter.**

My favorite orange version is actually a hybrid known as ‘Feegans’—it’s a 50-50 mix of the more orangey and sweet Fee Brothers West Indian Orange Bitters and the even more bitter Regans’ Orange Bitters No. 6.”

—David Wondrich

from
Cocktails
page 56



from
Israel
page 36



WHAT TO USE WHEN TOMATOES ARE OUT OF SEASON

Think globally to add acid to cold-weather dishes

When the temperature drops, chef Michael Solomonov avoids using sad and mealy out-of-season tomatoes for salads and garnishes at his Israeli-inspired restaurants. To replace their sweet acidity, he swaps in more surprising, exotic fruits. Tiny cubes of Asian pear provide sweetness and crunch in his cucumber salad (see page 42 for recipe), a necessary accompaniment to falafel or shawarma in pita sandwiches. Once Asian pears start to wane, diced mango adds tropical floral notes to the same salad. The sour tang and crunchy seeds of passion fruit (he loves using pomegranate seeds as well) liven up his tabbouleh (see page 44 for recipe) for a meze platter. And persimmons—whether the squat Fuyu, elongated Hachiya, or rotund Sharon Fruit variety—add a gentle sweetness and a pop of color. He pickles them in vinegar and spices like dried lime, cardamom, and coriander (see page 42 for recipe) and then slices them in wedges to serve alongside kebabs and other grilled or roasted meats. —B.M.

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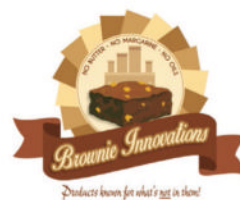
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Arman Party Restaurant, Herat, Afghanistan, October 31, 2015

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPH BY MELANIE DUNEA



From the moment I landed, I knew the people, the pace of this place, and the smells of the country would stay with me for years. One night, my hosts took me to a restaurant in town and we were seated hidden away in this little alcove (a white Western woman in that part of the world needs to be respectfully discreet). I took off my shoes and tucked my feet under me on this exquisite old Oriental rug and waited. The men around me smoked hookah and laughed uproariously (no doubt due to whatever was in the pipe), chasing their puffs with handfuls of food and energy drinks, a big hit there. Moments after we'd arrived, the waitstaff put down a plastic tablecloth on top of the rug and then served us all some spicy vegetable soup, skewers of lamb, beef and chicken, a flatbread called *noni*, rice, and *sabzi*, a cooked spinach dish with coriander and cilantro. I tore into everything with my hands, as is the custom there—it happens to be my preferred way to eat, which drives my mother crazy—the meat spiced with turmeric, nutmeg, and cardamom and so succulent, the rice fluffy and just subtly flavored and colored with saffron. After everything was quickly devoured, we used straws to drink cooling plain yogurt, as you do at the close of the meal there. The whole dinner, from the moment I took off my shoes to when I found myself whisked out into the waiting convoy of cars again, lasted no more than 15 minutes. In and out. The best fast food I've ever had.

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